

The Best Laid Plans

by Fleataxi

Chapter 1

James Van DeGraff was a divorced 43 year-old UPS driver and a closet Survivalist.

He thought that the main threat to him and his MAG was a nuclear war or a Chinese invasion. He had a blind spot as far as the H5N1 pandemic was concerned. They met in Rick's basement once a month to plan and train for the coming war with China. None of them paid much attention to foreign press reports of a "Possible pandemic" because the US Media ignored it. They thought that the foreign press were just crying wolf, and were spending more time role playing and training for the defense of their neighborhood from the Chinese.

All his preps were based on the Nuclear War/Invasion Scenario, so he had a retreat with a bomb shelter, food, water, a gas mask and 3 NBC filters for it. His main weapon was a HBAR AR-15 with a Trijicon ACOG tritium 4x sight. He would have preferred a 3x9x40 scope, but the MAG decided on the tritium powered sight to allow "quick kill" techniques. He thought the phrase "Quick Kill" in the same sentence as "AR-15" was an Oxymoron. He wanted either an AK-47 or M-1a. The AK was out thanks to California's draconian "Assault Weapons Ban", and the AR-15's were purchased right before they were made illegal too.

Late in 2005, a JAL flight carrying a Japanese businessman was also carrying something no one knew about: A-H5N1, the lethal variant of the "Bird Flu". He had just come back from a business meeting in Hong Kong, and was flying to LAX, then on to NYC for a business meeting. He was a poultry buyer and had been infected by H5N1 and didn't know it because you were infectious 24 hours after contracting the virus, but you didn't show symptoms for up to a week. The lady sitting next to him was a famous LA Model coming home from a shoot in Japan with her agent, photographer, and crew. She flew first class, and everyone else flew coach. The only first class seat left on the plane was next to Mr. Yamamoto, who was a very nice businessman, and spoke pretty good English. During the flight, he sneezed several times, and like most Japanese, immediately

covered his mouth and nose, but his hand came down and rested on the armrest between them seconds later. She touched the armrest minutes later to pick it up when dinner was served, so they could lower the tray between them and eat in comfort. Nicole wasn't a big fan of Sushi, but they weren't serving steak on this flight, so she ate her sushi quietly with her fingers, not knowing that she was now infected with H5N1, and the virus was coursing through her bloodstream.

Several days later, Nicole was at the Galleria Mall signing autographs. James was delivering packages, and stopped by her table to get an autographed picture for his girlfriend Lonnie, who was a big fan. He was the 3rd one in line, and when he got to the front, there was no one behind him, so Nicole chatted with him for a couple of minutes after she signed an 8x10 glossy "To Lonnie, Love Nichole". Before he went to leave, she stuck her hand out for him to shake her hand. He didn't think anything of it, and shook her hand, even if her handshake reminded him of handling a dead fish. Less than a minute later, he reached into his pocket and wiped his brow with his handkerchief, and rubbed the sweat out of his eyes. He was mad that the Galleria was too cheap to run the AC during the summer, and he routinely sweated gallons each day. When he touched his eyes, the virus on his hands entered his system through his eyes, and he was infected.

Over the next week, he delivered thousands of packages throughout greater Los Angeles, infecting thousands of people who inadvertently either touched surfaces he had just touched like their packages, or made direct contact with his hands. James was a friendly guy, and frequently shook hands with customers who thanked him for a job well done. When he came in at the end of his shift to change out of his uniform and sneezed all over the place, he infected dozens of UPS personnel, who in turn infected thousands more each. Over the next week, the number of people grew exponentially, yet they were still not showing symptoms, so the Health Department didn't know that H5N1 was already here.

That evening James had tickets to the Laker's game, and invited Rick. Lonnie wasn't into Basketball, which was OK with James, who took advantage of the "male bonding scene" to have several beers and let his hair down. Every surface he touched at the arena was possibly contaminated with virus depending on how frequently James sneezed, wiped his face, or otherwise contaminated the space around him. Over the space of the evening, Rick was thoroughly infected too, as were everyone sitting or standing in front of him when he sneezed.

Meanwhile, Mr. Yamamoto flew onward to NYC, infecting several others in the plane, and everyone he came in contact with in New York.

One week later, James was feeling bad, but not bad enough to skip a day of work, besides he got in a fight with his live-in girlfriend Lonnie the day before he went to get the autograph, which he hoped would patch things up between them. She decided to spend her 2-week vacation visiting her mom at her cabin in the Sierras. As James got more and more symptomatic, he was coughing and sneezing, infecting everyone around him. That night was the monthly MAG meeting, and he almost called in sick, but he knew Rick would call him a wuss for missing the meeting. Between Rick and James, every member of the MAG was infected at the end of the meeting.

James called in sick to work the next day, not knowing that this wasn't your average flu. 24 hours later, he was dead - the first of many people in Greater Los Angeles and the rest of the US to die from the Bird Flu.

Several days later, Lonnie forgave James for being a jerk - she realized that Men were basically Jerks, and when they weren't being jerks, she should count her blessings. She called James several times over the next couple of days, and went from concerned, to frustrated, to mad at him again for not returning her calls, not realizing James was dead and couldn't return her calls. Her mom's cabin in the Sierras was isolated, and the only contact to the outside world was her cell phone or the Internet. After her divorce, her mom took the divorce settlement, sold their million-dollar house in Los Angeles, and between the settlement and half the proceeds of the house, bought 20 acres of isolated property high in the Sierras and lived like a hermit. She wanted nothing to do with anyone except her only daughter, and withdrew into herself. She built a earth-sheltered home by burying an old Quonset hut she bought cheap on the internet as Gov't surplus with an old diesel backhoe she used for her garden/farm and various chores around the ranch. She had a well drilled into the aquifer, and dug her own septic system following plans from Mother Earth News. She was a life-long subscriber, and kept all her back issues. Everything she did for her "cabin" or "The Cave" as Lonnie called it was from Mother Earth News, including her solar water heater and masonry heater/stove with a cooktop for cooking. She had a small solar/wind power system to power her few "modern conveniences" as she called them - florescent lights throughout the house, her laptop computer and DSL connection, and an electric

washer, she refused to scrub clothes on a washboard. Nellie was a died-in-the-wool Liberal like her daughter, and didn't understand why James wanted all those guns and things, after all, he wasn't a cop or in the military.

Lonnie was starting to come around to James way of thinking, and at least kept a Bug Out Bag in the back of her Jeep, along with a Colt Commander with 3 spare mags and 100 rounds of JHP defensive ammo. Nellie never saw the inside of Lonnie's bag, so she didn't know her daughter carried a gun.

2 weeks later, Lonnie bid farewell to her mom, her vacation was up, and she had to get back to work. She worked as a graphic artist at a small computer graphics company in the San Fernando Valley. She lived with James, but after this week, she wasn't sure that was going to last much longer. He never returned her calls, and she checked her voice mailbox daily. As she drove back down 5 from Sacramento, she was singing to the radio, and her mood improved. When she arrived at James' apartment later that evening, she opened the door and almost gagged at the smell. She ran back out to her Jeep, grabbed the gas mask out of her BOB, and thinking there might be some danger to her, grabbed her Colt Commander as well. She carefully checked the house, and screamed when she saw James' bloated corpse laying on the bed. She grabbed the cordless phone, ran outside, put her gas mask and gun up, then dialed 911 from outside the house. 5 minutes later, a black and white showed up, and she explained to the officer that she had just returned from 2 weeks staying at her mom's house in the mountains to discover her boyfriend's dead body in the bed. When he opened the door, the smell made him close it quickly, then call dispatch to send a supervisor, a homicide detective, and the coroner.

Half an hour later, the Homicide detective showed up, took Lonnie's statement, took her prints with a field kit, then donning a gas mask, entered the apartment, took pictures of the crime scene, the body, then re-interviewed Lonnie. He told her that they had to wait for the coroner's report, but couldn't see any obvious signs of foul play, so he wasn't going to arrest her, but she wasn't to leave town until the coroner's report came back in 2 weeks. Lonnie was too stunned to react to the detective's suspicions. An hour later, the Coroner's van showed up, and 2 attendants wearing masks, gowns, and gloves so as not to get any fibers on the body, zipped James into a body bag, laid it gently on a stretcher, and wheeled it out and put it aboard the van, then they left, leaving Lonnie alone with the first police officer to arrive on the scene. The police officer was nice enough to help

her clean up, and get the place vented and aired out. She sprayed several cans full of Lysol around the apartment to kill the smell of the dead body, and slept on the couch that night.

Lonnie called her boss the next morning, she didn't feel like coming into work, but her boss begged her to, seems several key employees were sick with flu-like symptoms and as usual, they were up against a deadline to get a project done. Lonnie agreed to come in under the condition that as soon as the project was done, she could take an extended leave of absence. The boss reluctantly agreed since her employment contract allowed 2 weeks unpaid bereavement leave.

The commute to work was long and frustrating, but she finally made it to work. On the way in, she listened to her favorite talk radio show, and they were talking about this mysterious flu. No one had put 2 and 2 together, and realized it might be H5N1, which was supposed to be still confined to Asia. Lonnie wondered what killed James, and requested a copy of the coroner's report from the officer before he left. Since she was the closest thing James had to a next of kin, he agreed. Lonnie made it to work, went straight to her cubicle without greeting anyone, she wasn't really in the mood for chit-chat anyway. When she broke for lunch later that afternoon, she realized she was the only person at work. She called the boss on his cell phone, and he apologized. He was on his way to work that morning when he was hit by a sudden high fever, sweating profusely. Finally he pulled over, then drove himself to the Emergency room. They were in the process of admitting him when she called. Finally, he said "I'm sorry Lonnie, looks like you're it. I'll get back to work as soon as they let me out of here."

"Ok Boss, I'll hold down the fort, but I'm charging overtime rates for this."

"I'll pay you whatever you want, just get this project done."

Instead of going out to eat, Lonnie called the nearby Chinese takeout, and ordered enough food to last several days. She wasn't going home until this project was done - there was nothing at home for her anyway. When the delivery driver showed up, she paid him out of petty cash and got a receipt. Her boss had done that before, and she knew it would be OK with him. She ate some of the food, then put the rest in the refrigerator and went back to work. Around 9 o'clock, she called it quits for the day, microwaved a plate of Chinese food, then took a blanket

and fell asleep on the couch in the break room. She got up at 6 o'clock the next morning, made some coffee, and ate some more Chinese food and then went back to work. When no one had come back by lunchtime, she was getting worried, and called her boss Jerry's cell phone. She was confused when he didn't answer it, and really confused when she realized that a nurse answered his phone.

"Where's Jerry?"

"Who am I speaking to, please?"

"I'm Lonnie Simpson, I work for Jerry. He was admitted to the ER yesterday with flu-like symptoms."

"I'm sorry Lonnie, Jerry died this morning, can I get a number to call you back?"

Panicked, Lonnie disconnected the call and dropped the phone like a snake. 5 minutes later, the phone rang, and she reluctantly picked it up. It was the police officer that had been so nice to her the other day.

"Is this Lonnie Simpson?"

"Yes it is."

"Lonnie, it's Officer Adams. The coroner's report came back, and James died of natural causes."

"He's healthy as a horse, how'd that happen?"

"Not sure, I was listening to the radio, and there was a flu going around."

"I know, I just called my Boss yesterday, and he was admitted to the ER with flu-like symptoms, and today I called to find out how he was doing, and the nurse said he was dead! He never made it in to work, and drove himself right to the ER from his house."

"Lonnie, something's going around, and people are dying. You might want to isolate yourself until this blows over."

“Thanks Officer Adams, goodbye and good luck!”

“You too Lonnie! Vaya Con Dios!”

Lonnie turned on the TV in the break room and saw scenes of Chaos at the local hospitals as they got overloaded with patients. All the reporter knew was they were all coming down with flu-like symptoms. Remembering what Officer Adams told her, she realized it might be an idea to take an extended vacation with her mom. She went out to her Jeep, and drove straight to her apartment. When she calmed down a little, she located James’ “Bug Out List” and reading down the list, she saw an entry called “bioterrorism” and read that flu-like symptoms could be caused by natural or biological weapons, and the only solution was isolation, and either N -95 or N -100 filter masks, or gas masks. She knew where the N-95's were, so she quickly put 1 on and kept reading. Under “bug-out instructions” was an entry for the address of a nearby self-storage garage, and a key to open the lock. She packed her Jeep Cherokee with food, clothing, all their emergency preps and anything else she could use until it was as full as she could get it, then drove to the self-storage facility. She opened the garage, and there was a pre-packed trailer fully loaded with everything they’d need for the 2 of them for an extended bug-out. Next to it was 4 5-gallon gas cans full of treated gas. She emptied them into the tank of her near-empty Jeep, and kept the cans for later. She hitched the trailer to her Jeep Cherokee, and was glad that she got the towing package and the big V-8. She saw 4 more full gas cans in the trailer before she rolled the door of the trailer back down and locked it, then took the key out of the lock and put it on her key chain.

She pulled the trailer out of the garage, rolled the garage door back down, and locked it. Realizing that things could get ugly, she reached into the BOB in the back of her Cherokee and took out her Commander and the IWB holster it was in, made sure the chamber was loaded and the safety on, then stuck it between her pants and underwear behind her right kidney, then added the 4 single-mag carriers in strategic locations and tightened her belt. The ears on the Bladeteck holsters caught on the lower edge of the belt, and held them in place. Next she took her Spyderco Civilian and put it in her front shirt pocket where she could reach it easily. She remembered James had told her to check their joint safe deposit box on the way out of town if she could, so she drove to the bank, leaving her filter mask on. On her way to the bank, traffic was lighter than normal, but she didn’t

really notice, she was lost in her own thoughts. When she got there, there were only 2 vehicles in the parking lot on Monday afternoon at 4:00, which should be their busy time. Feeling silly, she left her mask on and walked into the bank. She was greeted by the Branch manager, who was wearing a paper filter mask too.

“May I help you?”

“I need to check my safe deposit and make a cash withdrawal, can you check my balance for me?”

“Sure Lonnie, shouldn’t you be at work right now?”

“I took the day off, and judging by the fact that you’re wearing a mask too, you know something’s going on, and I wanted to get the heck out of dodge before it got any worse.”

Ok, I’ve got your account info right here. Your balance is \$3517.95, did you want that in cash, a cashier’s check, or what?”

“Cash please, 50's and 100's, and 500 in 20's or less.”

“Ok, if you’ll give me your safe deposit key, I’ll get your box, then I’ll get your cash. I’ll give you a deposit bag to hold your cash.”

“Thanks Nancy. You might want to find a safe place to hole up for a while until they know what’s going on out there.”

Lonnie handed Nancy her safe deposit key, and 5 minutes later, Nancy handed her her safe deposit box and a large deposit bag, and showed her a room. Lonnie closed the door, opened the box, and was amazed at what she found. Besides the usual paperwork, there was a box of 1oz Canadian Maple Leafs, and another of US silver dollars. The note on the box said there were 20 Canadian Maple Leafs, and 100 US Silver Eagles. She emptied the safe deposit box, put the contents in the bag Nancy gave her, then walked to the teller window, where she signed the withdrawal slip, and Nancy handed her the account balance in cash. She asked for a second envelope, and put the 20's and smaller bills in it, then stored the rest in the bag. She said goodbye, then walked quickly to the Cherokee, and buried the

deposit bag in the back out of sight, and put the envelope with the 20's in her book bag/purse. She got back in her Jeep and drove out of town, heading toward I-5 north.

Somewhere near Modesto, she stopped at a self-serve gasoline station and filled up using her credit card, used the bathroom after thoroughly wiping all surfaces with some disinfectant wipes she kept in her purse, including the door knob, which she opened with one of the wipes. When she was finished, she got back in her Jeep and drove North to I-80. She couldn't understand why the traffic was so light, it should be bumper to bumper, so she turned on the radio, and they were telling everyone who could to stay home and stay isolated. "That explains it!" she said to herself. If everyone was staying at home, she could hopefully make it to her mom's place without any hassles. She drove on through the night, stopped to get gas when she needed to and only used self-serve pumps that took a credit card to avoid contact. She put on a set of plastic gloves before she handled the gas nozzle, which also protected her from any germs on the nozzle. She kept her N - 95 filter mask on even if the Attendant gave her funny looks. She remembered that she had empty gas cans in the trailer, and since the station was deserted, she took the time to fill them up again, and put them back in the trailer. If she ever got the credit card bill, she'd be amazed, so she wasn't too worried about ringing up a \$120 gas bill.

As it got dark, she turned on her lights and kept driving, and only stopped for gas, or to use the restroom. She was really careful, and paid attention to her mirrors. She stopped outside Sacramento to fill up, and right as she finished, this truck full of White Trailer Trash pulled up next to her, and some guy with a bad haircut and no teeth started crudely hitting up on her. The hair on the back of her neck stood up when he said "Hey darlin, why don't you come with us - we're going to have a real good party!" Suddenly she realized the dirtbags had flanked her, and she still didn't have her gun drawn. She decided that there was no time like the present, and pulled her Colt and pointed the gun right at the leader's head, and told him "Get back in your vehicle now while you still can!" Out of the corner of her eye, she detected movement, swivelled, and seeing a big Bowie knife in the hands of another dirtbag, finished taking up the slack on the trigger right as the front sight settled on his forehead. The 200gr jacketed hollow point turned what brains he had into a red mist and blew it out of the back of his head. She quickly swivelled back to the leader, and said "You want to join him - now get back into the truck,

and drive out of here. If I see your greasy face again, I can guarantee you'll get a bullet in your forehead too!"

"Don't Shoot! We just wanted to party with you!"

"Can't you take no for an answer, now git back in that truck before I decide to ventilate the lot of you!"

The remaining trailer trash scampered back into the yellow Ford truck and burned rubber out of the station. Lonnie looked at the dead dirtbag at her feet, and decided she better split before the cops showed up, since concealed carry without a permit in California was a major felony. Luckily she was already facing out, and drove down the road, then made 4 consecutive right turns to make sure she wasn't being followed, paying attention to her mirrors. No one was following her, and she debated going on, or staying overnight. Realizing that she'd be safer at her mom's house, she decided to keep driving. Finally she reached the little dirt road to her mom's house, and as she reached the driveway, tapped "shave and a haircut" on the horn so her Mom knew it was her, then she pulled up and parked.

2 minutes later, Nellie came out the front door pulling her coat on over her housecoat "What are you doing here Lonnie?"

"Hi mom, nice to see you too!"

"Sorry didn't mean to be rude, but didn't you just leave here?"

"Something bad is happening in the valley, James and my boss Jerry are both dead, and the news is broadcasting something about a flu going around."

"Oh Shit! I was afraid of this. One of the reasons I bought this place was the SARS epidemic years ago. I was reading on the Internet about this H5N1 thing, but they said it was still in Asia. Then again, all it would take was 1 infected person to board an international jet, and infect someone else on the flight, then it would spread like wildfire. I'm sorry James is dead, but you did the right thing coming here."

"Mom, I brought all of our emergency supplies with me, including James bug-out

trailer full of stuff. I didn't have time to check it, but I'm sure it's packed full of stuff we'd need to survive for years on our own. There's one other thing you need to know. I had to shoot some dirtbag at a gas station with a Bowie knife who was trying to rape me."

"Well you know how I feel about guns, but I'm glad you're OK. Let's go in the house, and I'll fix you dinner, and you can tell me about it if you want. I'll get your room all fixed up so you can sleep in your bed tonight."

"Thanks Mom, I don't know what I'd do without you!"

"I just Thank God you were able to make it here. Now let's get you inside and fed. I'm sure you're tired and could use a long night's sleep."

Chapter 2

The next morning Lonnie woke up to the smell of coffee brewing and bacon frying. She had to smile, for all her “Liberal” beliefs, her mom was a very independent woman, and ate what she felt like, despite what everyone else was doing. Personally she thought the Vegans were nuts, and were more of a Political movement than a lifestyle. Nellie might have hugged a tree or two in her life, but she never met one that hugged back. Nellie was more of a Classic 60's Liberal, unlike the new crop of neo-liberals that wanted to force everyone to believe everything they did. She saw them for what they really were, a bunch of radicals using liberal causes for their own personal power. She didn't like guns, but not for the same reasons the rest of the liberal party did, she was a true Pacifist. She understood her daughter's viewpoint and just agreed to disagree. Having Lonnie was the best thing she ever did, and was grateful that she had returned to her cabin. She checked the internet last night after Lonnie had gone to bed exhausted by a long dangerous trip, and found out the CDC was very busy, but was keeping their information away from the general public. From reading between the lines, it was clear that they had a multi-origin H5N1 outbreak in the US, centered around LA and NYC. Nellie theorized that an international airline passenger was the probable Patient Zero, but he was probably dead now. Checking a couple of other websites, she was glad she had made all that Elderberry Tincture. She got a funny look at the checkout line when she bought 4 1.75-liter bottles of cheap vodka and a dozen cans of frozen orange juice at the Costco in Reno.

Due to her location instead of her political world view, Nellie was a prepper, and had 5 years worth of storage in her cabin for the 2 of them. Once Lonnie was old enough to drive, they built an earth-sheltered garage next to the earth-sheltered house using a surplus Quonset hut, and a poured concrete floor and footings with embedded bolts to attach the Quonset hut. One of her neighbors helped them stretch the reinforcing wire grid over the Quonset hut, and pour 6 inches of shotcrete, and helped with the rest of the concrete work. Nellie put high-wind hats on the vent pipes that stuck out of the roof. With the heavy snow load, she made them 12 feet above the roofline and guyed the pipes very well, and added 4-6 feet of dirt on top. Between the earth sheltering, and the masonry heater stove, she only burned a couple of cords of wood per year, and most of that went to cooking and heating. During the summer when it got too warm, Nellie would move to her “outdoor” kitchen on her screened-in porch and cooked out there so she wouldn't

heat up the house. Before they erected the garage, Nellie had two 5,000 gallon tanks buried and connected to a small pump with valves and a primitive gas nozzle to fill their vehicles and her snowmobile. From living in the High Sierras for the last 30 years, Nellie knew once the snow started, the only way to get anywhere in the winter was either cross-country skis, or a snowmobile. She was even prepared for a major snowstorm and put a second-floor door in her Quonset hut that opened onto the roof of the porch so she could ski out if necessary. She used it at least once per winter, they got anywhere from 5-20 feet of snow out of a really bad storm at this altitude in the Sierras, especially on the Western Slopes where she lived.

Lonnie lived with her mom in their cabin since she was maybe 5 years old when her parents split up, and Nellie got sole legal and physical custody when she found out that not only was Norbert cheating on her, but he was cheating on her with another man! He was a prominent attorney, and settled out of court for 1.5 million dollars plus half of the house with Nellie getting sole legal custody of Lonnie, and a pretty serious confidentiality clause. Lonnie spotted her dad on TV in drag back when she was 13. He was marching in a Gay Pride parade in San Francisco, when a cameraman zoomed in on 2 guys holding hands and a banner that said "Lawyers for Gay Rights." They thought they wouldn't be recognized in drag, but Nellie spotted him, and before she could switch the channel Lonnie did too. Lonnie ran screaming and crying into her bedroom, and Nellie shut the TV off. Lonnie was old enough to know what a Homosexual was, and what they did, and was thoroughly revolted by their behavior. When her mom walked in, Lonnie was still crying. "Mom, what's wrong with Daddy?"

"Lonnie, as near as I can figure, your Dad's always led a double life. I think he was always homosexual, and married me as a convenient cover-up for his true orientation."

"So why did you have me?"

"I loved him, and didn't realize what he was doing. I got pregnant shortly after we were married, and once I was pregnant, we rarely made love. I suspected he might be having an affair, but I never realized it was with his male law partner. As you can imagine, I was doubly devastated and confronted him. We lived in Orange County, which was pretty Conservative back then, and he was so afraid that his

secret lifestyle becoming public would ruin his law firm that he granted me an uncontested divorce, and a huge settlement. I'm still subject to the confidentiality agreement, so that's all I can say about it, except I'm set for life, and I'll never have to work a day in my life."

"Mom, I'm not gay, am I?"

"It's not contagious dear. I've been straight all my life, and frankly can't understand your dad or people like him. From what I've seen you're a perfectly normal teenage girl. You've been a bit isolated up here, but that's probably for the best, since it's kept you away from M-TV and the latest teen fads, including premarital sex and all the risks."

"Mom, what's sex like?"

"With the right person, it's the best thing in the world. I was a virgin when I married Norbert, and on our wedding night, I felt like I died and went to Heaven. It's the most pleasurable experience you'll ever feel. I don't regret waiting, since I firmly believe that sex is the one thing 2 people can share and totally open up to each other. "Doing it" with someone you're not married to cheapens it to just sex. Making love is totally different. It's emotional as well a physical."

With that, their "Mother/Daughter" talk ended with a hug, and Lonnie came back out of her room, and they never talked about her dad again.

Nellie snapped out of her reverie to check the bacon right before it burned. As she was turning it, she saw Lonnie's face peeking around the corner wearing her nightgown, bathrobe and slippers. "Breakfast is almost ready dear." Lonnie poured two cups of coffee and sat down then Nellie set the plates down, and then they sat down to eat breakfast quietly.

After breakfast, Lonnie took a shower, got dressed in her sweats and her knee-high Sheepskin boots her mom made for her with a Vibram hiker sole. She traded a sheep farmer one of her older goats for enough naturally tanned sheared sheepskins to make several pairs of boots for them, 2 pairs of outdoor boots, and 4 pairs of indoor "booties" with soft rubber soles that resembled moccasins but came up over their ankles for warmth. Lonnie loved the sheepskin boots, and only wore

a polypro liner sock when she wore them. The skins were tanned a natural chestnut color and the wool was the natural blond color of the sheep they came from. The rest of the morning, they unloaded her Jeep and the trailer. Nellie almost had a stroke when they unloaded the trailer and uncovered James' arsenal. Inside 2 pelican cases were 2 AR-15's and 10 loaded 20-round mags. They were the H-BAR flat-top variant with the ACOG 4x scope mounted with a QD mount, and next to them in the case was a Simmons 3x12x50 adjustable objective scope on QD mounts and a laser boresighter. Lonnie sat down her mom, and explained the facts of life to her.

"Mom, I know you don't like guns, and you're a Pacifist, but we need these weapons to survive. Remember what happened to me on the way here, a bunch of trailer trash were going to kidnap me and have a party, which really meant they wanted to rape me, and keep me prisoner if they could as a sex slave to them. Right now the Police and Military people are going to be the first ones dying since their jobs put them in contact with infected people. The doctors and nurses are probably infected too. Once the police and military are either dead or bunkered in with their families, who's going to respond to your 911 call?"

Nellie didn't know how to answer her daughter. She did some soul searching as they unloaded the rest of the trailer, and saw the rest of James' gear and realized that if they didn't have this house to bug out to, they'd need everything in this trailer to survive including tents, sleeping bags, backpacks, stoves, dehydrated and freeze-dried backpacking food, and some pretty extensive first aid kits. She asked Lonnie about all that, and she told her. "Mom, James was a member of what's called a Mutual Assistance Group. They bought a piece of land in the Angeles Forest and built a fall-out shelter and equipped it with everything they would need to survive a nuclear war, or a Chinese invasion. He had an extensive list in binder in the cabinet above the refrigerator detailing all their preps and protocols for various disasters including Bioterrorism. I read his list before I bugged out here, and the Bioterrorism protocol seemed to be the best match, so I immediately put on my N -95 mask, packed everything in the Cherokee, stopped by a self-storage garage to pick up this pre-loaded trailer, then the bank, then I got the heck out of Dodge. I had a pretty uneventful trip because they were telling everyone to stay home. The only dangerous spot was when I was accosted by those trailer trash at the gas station. If I didn't have my gun, I would have been dead or worse."

“You were carrying a gun? Don’t you know that you can go to jail for that?”

“Mom, I’d rather be tried by 12 than carried by 6! At least in a courtroom I have a chance to defend myself. Most of the Anti-gunners in California aren’t like you - they want everyone disarmed so they’re easier to control. You told me yourself this new batch of Liberals aren’t anything like you, they just want to be in power, and are using Liberal causes to keep themselves in power, and to get even more power. My guess is they don’t care for the people at all, and just want to keep getting re-elected.”

“You’re probably right there. OK, you can keep those rifles in the house, but don’t expect me to shoot anyone.”

“OK Mom, I’ll try to protect us, but you realize that by myself I could easily get overwhelmed by sheer numbers. With someone watching my back, I’ve got a better chance.”

“We’ll cross that bridge when we get there, this place is pretty isolated, and off the beaten path. Unless you know it’s here, you wouldn’t know it was. That’s why I bought it. The “road” is nothing more than a CDF fire road they maintain to fight fires. My driveway looks like another branch of the road, and the house isn’t visible from the road.”

“Ok, how about when the food runs out in the valley, and scared hungry refugees come up here looking for food and a place to stay? Or better yet, the criminal element decides to check out the houses and ranches they know are up here, and find us? No matter how soft-hearted you are, we don’t have enough food and supplies to start feeding and housing refugees, they’ll eat us out of house and home.”

“What if they’re willing to work for food?”

“If they’re trustworthy and hard working, maybe - but they can’t be going from place to place, or they’ll tell their friends that we have food and supplies, then we’ll be overwhelmed with refugees. Also, until the bug dies out in a couple of years, anyone we come in contact with from here on out might be a carrier.”

“You’re right Lonnie, while you were asleep, I checked up on H5N1, and it’s a

bad bug. You can be infected and infecting others for up to a week before you show signs you're sick. Thank God it's not airborne, but can be transmitted by casual contact like the common cold. One thing, I hope you like drinking, because we need to start you on a preventative dosage of Elderberry extract for the next couple of weeks in case you were exposed. The easiest way to get your medicine is for me to make us a Nightcap every night before bed. I used 80 proof vodka to make the extract with and bought a case of orange juice. I tried one after I made it, and they're not as bad as I thought. You should have seen the looks I got at Costco when I bought 2 gallons of cheap vodka and a case of OJ- they must have thought I was an Alcoholic and going on a serious bender!"

The two of them laughed themselves silly at the image of her mom buying all that booze. She wasn't a teetotaler, but rarely drank, she didn't see the point in killing brain cells she might need later just to get a buzz. They spent the rest of the day unpacking and organizing everything Lonnie brought with her. By mutual agreement, Lonnie kept the Pelican cases with the AR-15's, and the cases of ammo in her bedroom. For some reason, Nellie relented and let her keep the Mossberg 590 shotgun loaded by the front door with the sling over a peg set in the wall to hang coats on. Lonnie pointed out that a 12-gauge is a great weapon for greeting unwanted guests, and they quickly get the idea that there are 2 ends to a shotgun, and that they were on the wrong end, and tend to leave quickly. Nellie had to laugh at that image, and allowed Lonnie to show her how to use it, and she even fired enough rounds that afternoon at a stump 20 feet away to learn how to aim and fire the gun. She wasn't looking forward to having to use it, but hoped it would intimidate anyone who decided to visit their place.

Nellie made stew for dinner, then they drank a Nightcap each before bed. Lonnie had to admit that they didn't taste too bad, but they were definitely an acquired taste. They went to bed after they finished their drinks, and Lonnie passed out right after her head hit the pillow.

The next morning, she awoke to the smells of breakfast and quickly got dressed. Right after breakfast, Nellie heard the sounds of a car driving up the driveway, and Lonnie reached for the 12 gauge and cycled a round into the chamber, then stood next to the door with the shotgun at port arms. Lonnie got dressed quickly, then opened the door to see Deputy Smith step out of his vehicle wearing a face mask with his hands in plain sight. He stood and waved, then reached into his cruiser,

and seeing this, Lonnie almost stepped through the door and pointed the shotgun at him until she saw he had a microphone in his hand, and quickly stepped back behind the door. Seconds later, they heard his voice over the PA. “Nellie, the Sheriff sent us out to check on the cabins, and make sure everyone’s OK. I saw some movement behind you, is everything OK?”

Nellie yelled “Sure deputy, that’s just my paranoid daughter Lonnie. I guess she’d never met you, so what you doing here?”

“I’m keeping my distance until this bug’s over. If you’ve got enough supplies, I’d stay at your cabin for the next couple of years. When the coast is clear, I’ll come up here and tell you. Just in case, if you don’t see me, wait 2 years from today before venturing into town. So far we haven’t gotten any refugees or looters, but the Sheriff wanted us to make it clear that you’re to do whatever you have to defend yourselves, including shooting on sight. I know how you feel about guns Nellie, but you might want to reconsider your position, I can guarantee you’ll probably have to shoot someone in the next couple of years if you want to live. The department is going to stand down right after we’ve contacted everyone for the duration of the emergency, and we won’t be able to respond to any calls for help.”

Nellie was mad, and let Deputy Smith know it, “Why the hell do we have a Sheriff’s department when every time things get dicey you guys bug out?”

“Look Nellie - we’re Public Servants, not suicidal fanatics. If you read the Constitution and the Federal Papers, and various court cases, you’d see the police have no legal obligation to protect you unless you’re in Police Custody. We can’t be everywhere at once, and as lethal as this bug is, the Sheriff decided to stand down for the duration instead of getting us all killed.”

With the message delivered, Deputy Smith shook his head, climbed back into his cruiser, and drove on to the next cabin.

Nellie walked back in the cabin furious. “Damn them, they’re a bunch of cowards!”

“Mom, you heard what he said - the Sheriff decided that patrolling would just get

his small department killed. I doubt if he's got 5 deputies to cover the entire county. If 1 or 2 of them died of this bug, they wouldn't be able to do anything. Not only that, but he's right. James read me chapter and verse of the Supreme Court Decisions and other writings that we never get to read in school. It clearly states that the Police are NOT under any obligation to protect any individual that's not in police custody. Even when things are normal, you can't sue the police for not responding promptly to a 911 call. When things are like this, we're totally on our own."

Nellie sat down and stewed for a while, the more she thought about it, the more frustrated she got, finally she got on the Internet and checked out some sites she never checked out before, and read the documents in black and white, and realized that someone had been feeding her a line all these years. She was still a Pacificist, but realized that she had to make a choice to defend herself or not - it wasn't the police's job to defend her. Finally she broke down and cried, then dried her tears and walked out to where Lonnie was sitting.

"Can you teach me how to defend myself?"

Lonnie stood up with a grin on her face, felt her mom's forehead, and said "You feeling OK?"

"I just got the shock of my life - this beats finding out your dad was a fairy! All these years I knew in my heart if I dialed 911 the police or fireman would show up and take care of everything. Now I realized I was seriously deluded. Thank God James bought both of those AR-15's and put them in his bug out trailer."

"Mom, before you get all excited, the AR-15 fires a little tiny bullet, and some older grizzled Army Sergeants derisively called them "Poodle Shooters" for years for a very good reason - they don't have very much stopping power compared to a 30 caliber main battle rifle like the M -1 Garand. It takes precision marksmanship, or a lot of bullets to kill someone with an AR-15. The good news is the recoil is pretty tame, and they've barely got enough energy to kill someone at 300 yards. This isn't something you can just pick up and really be good with it, you're going to have to practice an hour a day until you get it right, then once a week weather permitting once you're able to shoot a 1" group at 100 yards. That means 5 shots inside the 1" bull's-eye at 100 yards prone. It's not easy, I almost shot a whole

case of ammo at the range until I got it right. I've got another Colt Commander with a holster and 4 spare mags in the kit in case I lost this one, or didn't have it on me when the balloon went up. You need to learn to shoot that too!"

"Now I see why James had so much ammo with him when we unloaded the trailer - is it going to be enough?"

"There's 3 cases of .223 ammo, 1 of Jacketed Hollow Point defensive ammo, and 2 of full metal jacket practice ammo, plus 2 cases of .45 acp, 1 of defensive ammo, and 1 of practice ammo. There's also a case of Federal Tactical 00 Buckshot and another case of Tactical Slugs, and 1 of #7 birdshot for practice and hunting."

"My my, no wonder why those green boxes were so heavy, they were full of ammo."

"Mom, they're surplus 50 caliber ammo cans, but they work well for storing large quantities of smaller caliber ammo since they're air and water tight."

"Whatever they are, they're damn heavy!"

"Ok, I've got a roll of 100 B-27 targets and a roll of 1" and 4" orange stickers to help you identify the exact spot you want the rounds to hit. Do you have any wooden pallets and a staple gun around here?"

"Of course dear, I never throw anything away! How many do you need?"

"4 for now, maybe more later if we damage these. Do you want to go shooting now?"

"Might as well while I'm still mad at that deputy!"

"He didn't have anything to do with it - the Sheriff's his boss, and he made the call!"

They dragged the 4 wooden pallets outside, set them up against stumps, then paced off 100 yards, then Lonnie dropped 2 tarps on the ground, then unfolded them and secured the corners with big rocks. They went back inside the house,

took out the rifles and safety gear in several trips. Once she had the targets up, and the orange stickers stuck over the forehead and the heart of the target, Lonnie showed her mom the scoring zones on the target, and explained that they corresponded with the vulnerable spots on the human body - the heart/lung region, spinal column, and the brain. She put the 1" dots on the 100 yard targets explaining that the little bullet coming out of the AR-15 would always wound someone, but might not kill them unless it struck the heart, spinal column, or the forehead right about the bridge of the nose. She used a 1" sticker to get her mom to concentrate on the center of these structures. Once she was finished, she started the "new shooter" lecture including safety rules, how to operate the AR-15, and basic shooting technique. Once she was prone, Lonnie handed her mom an unloaded AR-15, and showed her how to hold it, how to properly position her body so she could clearly see through the scope, and when she breathed, her crosshairs only moved up and down over the target instead of side to side.

Once she was relatively comfortable, she had her mom do 20 dry fires, paying attention to where the crosshairs were on the target when the trigger clicked. Finally she handed her mom a loaded magazine, showed her how to load the gun, and pull back on the charging handle like she did before. This time, after she pulled the trigger, she was amazed that there was a nice little hole in the center of the 1" target right over the dirtbag's heart, as she thought of it. Lonnie smiled, said "Beginner's luck - I'd like to see you do that again!" then waited with baited breath as her mom got steady behind the scope and squeezed off another round that was practically touching the first one. Lonnie was grinning like the Cheshire Cat - her mom may not like guns, but she was a natural shooter, just like her daughter! Lonnie had her fire the rest of the magazine, and while the rounds drifted out of the 1" circle, none drifted out of the 5X kill zone in the chest of the dirtbag B-27 target. When she finished, Nellie set her rifle down, then got up grinning to herself. "I still don't like killing people, but that was fun!"

"Mom, no one likes killing people, but sometimes you have to in order to save your life, or the life of your loved ones. I still have nightmares over that shooting, I see the dirtbag's head dissolving into a red mist over and over in my mind."

"Don't worry dear, we'll talk about it - I'm sure I can help!"

Chapter 3

Nellie's cabin was located in an isolated corner of Sierra County California about 50 miles Northwest of Reno, NV. Her cabin was surrounded by State and National Forrest land, and was one of the few pieces of private property in the area, with allodial title dating back to the 1800's. The Sierra County Sheriff's department was small and spread out over a geographically large county. The nearest town was Loyalton, CA to her north. She liked her privacy, yet she liked the green valleys, sharp craggy peaks, and best of all privacy accorded by the remote location of her house in the Sierra Nevadas. She didn't own any guns, so the state's anti-gun policies didn't phase her one way or the other. When they got back from shooting, Lonnie told her that the guns they had were barely legal, and if push came to shove, they could get in a bunch of trouble just for having them.

Now that she realized that she really was on her own, the idea of someone confiscating her guns and throwing her in jail bothered her. Lonnie suggested they shoot the pistols tomorrow, and she start carrying her E&E kit with her from here on out whenever she was outside. James had built 2 E&E backpacks on a pistol belt that included a plastic quart military canteen with the cup and stove nested inside, and a packet of hexamine tabs to heat water with and not leave much of an odor. In the little pouch was a bottle of Polar Pure tabs to disinfect water. Next to it was a kydex sheath holding a Ontario M -9 knife and a sharpening rod. On the right side was a military flap holster for the Colt Commander and a spare 7-shot magazine. He left room for 3 additional mags in the butt pack as well as a small survival kit and first aid kit. The kit was kind of minimalist, but was light enough that he knew Lonnie would be comfortable wearing it everywhere.

Lonnie helped her mom with the daily chores of feeding her goats, chickens and pigs, then they tackled the garden. Nellie had 3 years worth of vegetables stored in quart canning jars from her garden, and added to it every year, even though she gave away a large part of her produce to her neighbors, including Deputy Smith, who was a recent widower, and totally clueless in the kitchen. She thought he was handsome, but way too young for her. With James' death, maybe he could fix up Lonnie with him. At the very least, he could stay with them, and they'd have company and some security. She knew her daughter wanted to have kids, because she lamented the fact that James didn't want to bring kids into what he thought

was a seriously messed-up and doomed world. Nellie knew better, everyone thought “This is going to be the end” but somehow we overcame and adapted, and life went on. Some of her neighbors were just sitting around waiting for the world to end, not her, she enjoyed her life in the mountains, even if she wasn’t a social butterfly.

Once the chores were done, they settled down in the house and read or surfed the internet until dinner. Nellie liked her slower lifestyle, and Lonnie prayed she could get used to it again. Her life in LA was always on the move, always rushing here and there, and for what, her boyfriend was dead, her boss was dead, she didn’t have a job anymore, and if they got sick, either one of them could die. Lonnie decided that now was a good time to talk to her mom.

“Mom, how do you do it? I’ve spent my whole life after I left here running after something, and I thought that you were bored to tears up here. Now I realize all that rushing was for nothing, and every thing that mattered to me is gone, and everyone is dead. I’m afraid something’s going to happen to you, and I’ll really be alone.”

“Dear Lonnie, obviously I missed something in your education. You need to cultivate inner peace. I’m not talking about chanting at crystals or any other BS like that, I’m talking about a nice quiet place by yourself where you can think, relax and meditate without distractions. I’m not much of a Christian, but I have a Bible here if you want to read it. I’d start in the New Testament, the book of John if I were you.”

“Why didn’t you tell me this before?”

“That was one of the things we fought about, your dad wanted to wait until you were an adult, and let you make up your own mind, and I wanted to raise you Episcopalian like I was. It’s not a bad church, it’s just there aren’t any around here, so I never got to go after I split with your dad.”

“Mom, I need some meaning in my life, or I’ll go crazy.”

“Like I said, start reading in the Book of John. I’ll start you in my Message Bible, it’s easier to read. If you want to check more carefully, you might want to cross-

reference my New King James Bible. I've got some concordances and a Strong's dictionary around here somewhere." Nellie got up, located her Message Bible, and opened it to the book of John, and handed it to her daughter, who went back in the living room and started reading the Bible for the first time.

By the time dinner was ready, Nellie could see Lonnie was feeling better. "What happened?"

"Thanks mom, I was reading when all of a sudden things I'd felt for a long time started clicking. I don't know why, but I feel an incredible peace, like when I was a little girl, and everything was right with the world."

"As long as you put your trust in God, talk to him frequently, and then do what you can, things will be OK. They might not seem so at first, but I've learned God has a plan, and everything that happens is part of that plan."

"How about when Evil happens?"

"Do you remember the story of the Garden of Eden? Well Adam and Eve's disobedience allowed Sin to enter what was once paradise, and the result is all the evil that happens in the world."

"Well why doesn't God stop it - He's supposed to be all powerful."

"He is, it's just that he allows us to have free will. He wants us to willingly worship him as the Creator of the Universe. He made the Angels, but we were the only creatures he made that can choose to worship him. If he took away free will, we wouldn't be able to choose to worship him. The down side of that is some people use their free will to commit evil. Like those guys at the gas station. They didn't care what you wanted, they were only after their selfish pleasure. I guess that kind of explains Norbert's behavior. Lust is like greed, the more you feed it, the more it demands. If your lusts cause you to gravitate toward perverted behavior, and you feed that lust, your behavior gets more and more perverted. If you're not fixated on your own lust or greed, but are other-centered, you become a loving, caring person instead of greedy, lustful and selfish."

"I get it, it's all about choice. We can choose who we want to serve, God or Man."

“Exactly.”

They read for a while after dinner, then went to bed early after Nellie made them another Elderberry extract “Nightcap”. Nellie had always been an early riser, and Lonnie was learning to adapt to her mom’s schedule again. With no TV to keep her occupied, once she got tired in the evening, she decided to go to sleep.

The next morning Lonnie decided she could get used to waking up to the smells of breakfast and finished getting dressed right as her mom told her breakfast was ready. After eating a delicious healthy breakfast of oatmeal and raisins, Lonnie asked “What’s on the agenda today?”

“Once we get all the chores done this morning, I was going to teach you how to shoot that pistol on your belt.”

Nellie looked down and realized the gun she’d been carrying for the last day or so since Lonnie gave her the spare E&E kit was a pretty nice paperweight until she learned how to shoot it. She turned to her daughter and said “Let’s get the animals taken care of, then the rest can wait until later this afternoon.”

Lonnie took that for a yes, and broke several records caring for the animals, then she set up the pallets with fresh targets, and paced off 30 feet. She put a 4" sticker over the 5X zone in the center of the heart/lung region, and a 1" sticker in the center of the 5X zone right over the center of the forehead. She opened up the case of .45acp practice ammo, and started reloading her magazines with practice ammo, then showed her mom how to load magazines. They stored their defensive ammo in a couple of Ziploc bags. Once all the mags were loaded, she made sure there were no magazines or live rounds in her mom’s pistol, and showed her mom how to make sure the gun was empty, and how to engage the slide lock. Once she had shown her how to operate the pistol, she showed her how to dry fire the gun, then had her do 20 dry fires while aiming at the center of the 4" sticker 30 feet away. She was only to squeeze the trigger when the sights were exactly aligned right below the center of the target. After 20 dry fires, Lonnie handed her a pair of shooting glasses and ear plugs, then once she was ready, Lonnie handed her a loaded magazine. Nellie slammed the magazine into the well, grabbed the back of the slide, and pulled it fully to the rear, then let it fly forward, chambering a round. The hammer stayed back, and she swept the safety up with her right thumb just

like Lonnie taught her. When she was ready to shoot, she reached up with her right thumb and lowered the safety to the “fire” position, and aimed at the target.

She started getting nervous when she realized she was holding on to a loaded pistol, but got over it when she remembered what Deputy Smith told her. Just like before, she waited until the sights were centered on the target, and was completely surprised when the gun went off. She checked her target, and the first round was right in the center of the big yellow sticker. She was amazed that the gun didn’t twist skyward like it did in the movies, matter of fact, the recoil was just a soft push. She looked over to Lonnie, who was grinning, and gave her mom a “thumbs up” so she turned her head back to the target and kept shooting. When the magazine locked empty, Lonnie was pleasantly surprised to see that all 7 rounds were in the sticker. “Not bad for a beginner” she thought, then she realized her mom was only 10 yards away from the target, she wanted to see how well she did at 15 and 25 yards. 25 yards wasn’t really fair for the little Commander, the barrel was only a little over 3 inches long. Once her mom set the gun down, Lonnie gave her a big hug, then backed her up another 15 feet, and had her do it again. As expected, her groups opened up, and she slowed down, but all the rounds were still in the 5X “kill zone”.

“Great mom, you’ve got the basics down, now I need to teach you defensive shooting. Even with the small capacity of this gun, you need to learn the Failure to Stop drill, because some Bad Guys might be wearing a vest, or high on PCP. I’m going to move you back in to 10 yards, and what I want you to do is fire 2 rounds into the big yellow sticker as quick as you can, think a quick double squeeze, then as the muzzle comes back down out of recoil, I want you to put the 3rd round right in the center of that 1" dot on it’s forehead.”

Realizing her daughter had to blow some trailer trash’s brains out with a gun just like her’s to make sure he wasn’t going to attack her, she realized that everything she’d seen in movies was BS, and you needed to either blow the bad guys brains out, or destroy his heart and lungs to end the fight. She snapped out of her reverie when she realized she was holding a loaded gun, and her daughter was talking to her. She nodded her head, took a loaded magazine from Lonnie, shoved it in the magazine well, and released the slide. She left the safety in the fire position, and as soon as Lonnie indicated it was OK to fire, swept the barrel up, and as soon as she had her sight picture, she squeezed the trigger twice as quick as she could,

then as soon as the barrel came down out of recoil, she squeezed the trigger a 3rd time, only to watch the round go sailing over the top of the target. She brought her gun down to low ready, swept the safety back up, and turned to talk to Lonnie.

“Dang, that’s pretty tough. I got the first two rounds down, but I sent that 3rd round right over the target.”

“That’s exactly what I did at first mom - don’t rush that 3rd shot, and if anything, hold a little lower, say like around his mouth, and work your way up.”

Nellie nodded, swept the safety back down, and brought the gun up again. This time, she had 3 rounds in the target, but the 3rd round was 1 inch low. When she looked at Lonnie, she was nodding and smiling. She ejected the magazine, and fed a new full one in, then resumed firing. Later that afternoon, and several hundred rounds later, Nellie was finally getting all 3 rounds where they belonged. Lonnie could see she was getting tired, and called it quits for the day.

“Mom, you did really good. Next time let’s start working on your draw and speed. I’d like to shoot a couple of times a week as long as we’ve got extra ammo, and get you up to speed on all 3 weapons.”

“Sounds OK to me dear, now let’s go sit on the porch a while and rest, then tackle the garden.”

They picked everything up, then Nellie made some iced sun tea, and they sat on the porch swing sipping iced tea until they felt like tackling the garden. Weeding was a chore that Nellie looked forward to, she really liked to garden, and feel her hands running through the soil. Lonnie wasn’t into gardening, but wanted to help her mom. When they finished, Nellie made dinner in a big Dutch oven. For some reason Nellie made a lot of stews that were mostly vegetables with a little meat. Lonnie commented, and asked her mom if she had enough canning jars to put up a deer if she shot one. Nellie looked at her with a look of horror, then realized that the grocery store was closed for the next two years, and if they couldn’t grow it or hunt it, they wouldn’t eat it. She checked her pantry, and she had 10 cases of jars and 3 times as many lids, She only needed 1 or 2 cases to can the garden, and she recycled the jars each year. Lonnie asked her mom where there was a close resident herd of deer. She showed Lonnie on the map where the nearest herd was,

and Lonnie decided to go hunting the next day. She guessed that a single rifle shot wouldn't disturb too many people, or attract attention. She took the map and her compass, and planned a route that would get her mom's truck as close to the herd as possible without spooking it. She didn't want to have to drag that deer any further than she had to.

The next morning, she started her mom's truck. Nellie hadn't started her diesel in months, so Lonnie had to jumpstart it using her Jeep. She used the glow plugs to make it easier to start so she wouldn't have to use any of their limited stock of ether. Finally the engine started, and she let it warm up while she packed the truck with her scoped AR-15, a daybag, and all the stuff she'd need to skin, gut and butcher the deer in the field. Luckily for her, Nellie owned a device that attached to her receiver hitch that used a boat winch to haul a deer aloft to field butcher it. Lonnie was seriously confused, and guessed her mom was such a prepper and a pack rat that she bought it even though she never needed it, because she might some day. Lonnie hugged her mom, and drove as quietly as she could about 10 miles down the road to a spot her mom said should have plenty of deer. When she got close, Lonnie shut off the engine and coasted.

She got out, closed the door as quietly as she could, grabbed her AR-15 with a magazine full of JHP ammo and walked quietly to the edge of the clearing, then ducked down behind a downed tree, and took out her binoculars. On the far side of the meadow was a small herd of mule deer including several bucks and dozens of does. She decided to take one of the bucks which were slightly bigger than the does at around 140 pounds, and set up to shoot using the tree as a shooting rest. First she put in her earplugs, then quietly pulled back the charging handle, loading the rifle. Once she was set, she cleared the safety, and put the red dot of the ACOG sight on the neck/shoulder junction of the deer, which was about 130 yards away. Once she got her breathing slowed down, she released the safety, double-checked her position, and took up a firing grip on the rifle. She breathed in and out normally, then when she was ready, blew half the last breath out, and held her breath right as the red dot settled on the spot she wanted to shoot the deer. The noise of firing surprised her, and the rest of the herd bolted, except the buck, who fell in a heap where he stood. Lonnie went back to the truck, put everything up, and grabbed the wheeled game carrier to haul the deer to the truck.

She pushed the carrier to the buck, and checked her shot. Right through the

neck/shoulder where she was aiming. She was glad she could tell her mom the buck never felt a thing, and was dead less than a second after the round hit him since the bullet severed his spinal column. She horsed the buck onto the carrier, and hauled it back to the truck. Even with the wheels, it was a lot of work since the ground was soft. Finally she made it back to the truck, put the carrier down, and took a long drink of water. Next she attached the gambrel to the deer's hind legs, and hoisted him up. She put a large bucket under him to catch the blood, then severed both his jugulars with her knife. While the deer bled out, she took her skinner, and sliced from the neck to the butt, then quickly skinned the deer. Finally she gutted the animal and let it cool while she washed the gore off her hands and arms. She put the skin in a trash bag in case her mom wanted it, then quartered the deer and put the quarters in another bag. Once she was finished, she cleaned the bed of the truck, removed all the blood and gore, then packed everything up. She found a good spot to dump the blood and entrails she didn't want, then washed the bucket. When everything was cleaned up, she got back in the truck and drove home.

When she arrived at the house, Nellie was ready to can, and helped Lonnie section the meat, and cut it into pieces small enough to fit inside the quart jars and still leave enough room for brine. She spotted the bullet hole in the neck, and thanked Lonnie for taking the care to make sure the deer didn't suffer unnecessarily.

"Mom, it was only a 130 yard shot, I can shoot 1" groups at that distance all day long. Putting the round in the deer's neck meant I didn't have to chase it all over the place either."

They took the rest of the day cutting and canning the deer meat, and Nellie made roast venison for dinner with mashed potatoes instead of a stew. Lonnie made sure to thank her mom for serving Meat and Potatoes instead of Vegan Delight. Nellie laughed her head off, and they ate dinner quietly. After dinner, Lonnie helped her mother clean up, then she read her Bible for a while, then Nellie made them both a Elderberry Extract Nightcap and they went to bed.

Chapter 4

Lonnie woke up to the smells of breakfast cooking again, and quickly got dressed. Nellie made oatmeal most of the time instead of bacon and eggs to conserve her short supply of bacon and eggs. She had a small flock of chickens, and produced about a dozen eggs per week. She had a rooster in the flock so every now and then she left an extra egg to hatch, and when the older hens stopped laying, she took them out back and killed them, then they had chicken and rice soup for dinner for a while because those old laying hens were too tough to eat without boiling them all day long. When breakfast was finished, they did the chores, milked the goats, fed the chickens and pigs, then Lonnie asked her mom if she was willing to really learn how to shoot a 12 gauge. She looked at her daughter kind of funny until Lonnie explained that what they did last time was a basic familiarization, and now that they had the time, she wanted to teach her mom how to hit at greater distances with slugs, and combat shooting techniques. Nellie agreed, so the first thing Lonnie did was empty the shotgun, remove all the ammo from the room, cycle the action, and dry fire the shotgun out the door to make sure it was empty, then hand the empty shotgun to her mom. The first thing she was going to learn was the basic gun handling techniques.

James had made Lonnie read Louis Awerbuck's book on the Defensive Shotgun, and Lonnie used what she remembered from the book to teach her mom room-clearing drills, the low ready, high ready, and muzzle depressed positions, and when to use each. She highly suggested the low ready position for room clearing with the butt of the shotgun already shouldered. The shotgun had the Surefire Tactical Light forend, which was a very bright light, and Lonnie taught Nellie how to use it to clear a room and light up her target. Next she taught her how to visually sweep a room in pie-shaped sections from up close to far away so each part of the room got scanned at least twice, and how to safely negotiate doors and hallways.

Lonnie had a funny idea, and said "I'll be back in a second" then walked into her room and rummaged around. 10 minutes later she emerged wearing a Tiger Stripe cammo tank top, desert BDU pants, her black tactical boots and a woodland bandana, and a pair of mirrored Gargoyle shooting glasses, carrying the Mossberg 590 at port arms with the Ontario M9 bayonet mounted, and a bandoleer of 12 gauge rounds draped across her chest. Nellie literally fell on the floor laughing.

Lonnie set the shotgun down and took the bandoleer off to go help her mother onto the couch.

“That was the funniest thing I’ve ever seen - I’ll have to call you Rambette from now on!”

“Actually the bayonet is functional on the 590, for 2 reasons. If you run out of ammo in a close-quarters battle, like room to room, you can stick the bayonet in their guts using the shotgun stock to extend your reach beyond knife-fighting range. Also, if the bayonet is mounted, it makes it kind of tough for someone to try and grab your shotgun by the muzzle, they’re likely to wind up missing fingers!”

“Never thought of that before, here’s hoping I never need to mount a bayonet charge!”

“Actually, Mossberg designed the 590 for the Military, and the USMC issued them to their guard force with the bayonets. Seeing a bunch of Marines with bayonets mounted would tend to intimidate a bunch of rioting prisoners. Anyway, let’s go outside and I’ll teach you how to hit with slugs out to 100 yards. The ghosting sight allows much more precise aiming than the traditional bead sight system that most shotguns have. One other thing, the magazine holds 9 2.75" rounds but you only want to load 8 to make it easy to transition from buckshot to slug. Here’s how you do it - let’s say you just fired a buckshot round, and it didn’t do the trick, say they’re behind cover. Before you cycle the forend, stick a slug in the magazine, then cycle the forend, and the slug winds up in the chamber where you can shoot it. That’s the easiest way, or let’s say you haven’t fired the buckshot round, you can either shoot it, or load the slug in the magazine, then press this little lever here which unlocks the action, eject the buckshot, and load the slug round. My preference is to just shoot the buck unless there’s a really good reason not to, like the target is surrounded by friendlies, or it’s a hostage situation, and firing the buckshot would kill the hostage.”

When they finished, she took her mom outside, and told her that the Mossberg 590 had a Cylinder choke, which would allow them to shoot rifled slugs, and still left a decent pattern out to 25 yards using Federal Tactical 00 Buckshot, that is if all 9 30-caliber pellets inside an 12-inch circle with no doughnut was acceptable. She

explained to her mom that James had already patterned the shotgun out to 25 yards so they didn't need to do it again. All she needed to know was that for every 5 yards, the group opened up approximately 2 inches.

Nellie looked at her funny, so Lonnie explained "I guess you've been watching too many Westerns when the Frontier Wife shot her blunderbuss into the air and killed a dozen rampaging Injuns at 100 yards. It doesn't happen like that Mom. Outside 25 yards with a 12 gauge, you need to switch to slugs, which is a 70-caliber rifled piece of lead. They weigh almost an ounce, and cause a lot of damage when they hit, but it's kind of like shooting a big rifle. Nellie noticed that there was a big huge pad on the end of the shotgun's stock, and the stock looked like plastic, and had a slot that looked like it could carry 2 spare rounds. She asked Lonnie what it was.

"Mom, that's called Speedfeed stock, it comes stock from the factory like that. James shortened the stock 2 inches and added a removable 2-inch recoil pad to make it more comfortable to shoot. During the winter, when we're wearing heavy jackets, he included a 1" pad that we can replace in a minute. Up on the left side of the receiver, you'll see 6 more rounds, 2 of those are buckshot, and the other 4 are slugs. They're the ones with the lead showing. There's 2 more buckshot in the speedfeed stock." She shouldered the shotgun and showed her mom how to extract rounds from the Speedfeed and insert them in the magazine, then let her mom try it. Finally she took 4 pallets and set 2 at 25 yards, and 2 at 50 yards with fresh B-27 targets on them and the 4-inch and 1-inch stickers over the heart and forehead.

She returned to her mom, broke out several boxes of slugs, and 2 boxes of buckshot. She went through the manual of arms again, then handed her mom her shooting glasses and earplugs. When they both had their eye and ear protection on, she supervised her mom loading 5 slugs into the magazine, and told her to aim at the 50-yard target, and try to put all 5 rounds into the 4-inch sticker on the bad guy's chest. She suggested using the gun's recoil to assist her in cycling the action, and to remember to pull the forend all the way back, and slam it all the way forward aggressively to avoid short-cycling the gun and jamming it. Nellie got the sights locked on the 4" target, then squeezed the trigger, and as the gun went off, and the slide started to the rear, she used the bolt's inertia to help cycle the slide, and when it was all the way forward again, sighted on the target and fired her 2nd

round. The gun clicked after she fired her 5th round, and Lonnie was grinning like a maniac. Her mom was simply amazing. 2 weeks ago, she was a gun-hating Sheeple, now she was shooting a big bad 12 gauge shotgun like Linda Hamilton in Terminator! All 5 rounds were in the 5X ring, and 3 of them were on the 4" sticker. Any one of them would have been fatal to a MZB.

Nellie saw the huge grin on her daughter's face, and realized that she was having fun firing the shotgun. She never realized how much fun shooting was. She hoped she never had to shoot someone, but knew if she had to, especially to protect her daughter, she could. She handed the shotgun to Lonnie saying "Dr. Frankenstein, I presume?"

Now it was Lonnie's turn to laugh herself silly. When they got over the giggles, Lonnie set up 2 more targets, and moved them all in to 20 yards, then loaded 4 rounds of buckshot. Once everyone was set, she quickly snapped the shotgun up from low ready, cycled the action "ker-CHUNK" and blew the center of the left-most target to confetti, She swivelled right, cycled the action, and blew the next target away. When the 4th target was destroyed, Nellie was impressed. It took her daughter right around 5 seconds to engage 4 targets and blow the 5X zone away on all of them. She guessed she had some practicing to do. They picked up the targets and pallets, and carried everything back inside the "cabin".

Nellie made another pitcher of sun tea, and they spent the afternoon just gabbing on the porch. Towards evening, Lonnie spotted movement near the driveway, handed Nellie the 12 gauge and ran in the house for her AR-15, while Nellie loaded it full of 00 buck. She came out of the house wearing her LBV and carrying a bandoleer of 12 gauge ammo for the shotgun. They quickly decided that Lonnie would take a flanking position in the woods nearby while Nellie played "welcoming committee" just in case it was a neighbor. Lonnie walked quickly off to the right and was soon deep in the woods. She found a downed log to use for cover, and to act as a rifle rest. She knew it was usually considered bad manners to use a scope for a binoculars, but in this case, she wasn't worried about being rude, instead she wanted to protect her mom. 15 minutes later, a scruffy looking man carrying an AK-47 appeared on the edge of the wood line, heading toward Nellie. She recognized the weapon, and quickly loaded a magazine, and cycled the action.

“Whoever you are, that’s quite far enough. You make 1 wrong move and I’ll shoot - you’re trespassing.”

Lonnie realized it wasn’t a neighbor, and sighted in on the guy’s head in case he did something stupid. He didn’t raise his rifle but kept walking closer. Finally Nellie raised her shotgun and said “One more step Mister, and I’ll give you a third eye!”

Right as she was about to shoot, the guy yelled “Don’t shoot. I’ll lay the rifle down.” He set the AK down with the barrel pointed in a safe direction, then raised his hands. “Nellie, I think that’s you, I’m Leroy Nowland, Ronnie Nowland’s eldest. I’m trying to get home, and need some water.”

“Leroy, stay right there. How much water you need?”

“I gallon would be plenty. My truck broke down a mile back, when I ran out of gas, and I remembered you lived back here. I got caught in Sacto when the bug hit. You wouldn’t believe the chaos going on out there. I couldn’t get any more gas, and ran out right down the hill.”

“I’ve got some gas to spare, will 2 gallons get you home OK?”

“Sure would Nellie, I’d really appreciate it.”

“OK, I’ll get you a gallon of water and 2 gallons of gas. Sit down right were you are, and I’ll be back in a few. Don’t come no closer. When I’ve got everything together, I’ll set it on the ground 15 feet from you, then when I get back on the porch, I’d appreciate if you’d just pick the stuff up and leave. It’s too dangerous to get any closer to anyone who hasn’t been in absolute quarantine for the last 2 weeks.”

Nellie carried the shotgun into the cabin once Leroy sat down, then got a jug of water out of her pantry, and filled up a 2-gallon plastic gas can with gasoline. Knowing that Lonnie was keeping an eye on him, she opened the door and walked within 20 feet of Leroy, stopped, put the water and gasoline down, then backed up to the porch, and picked up the shotgun, but kept it at low ready. Leroy stood up, picked up the water and gas then said “Thanks Nellie. I’ll get the can back to you

when it's safe."

"Deputy Smith told me to stay isolated for 2 years, so don't hurry to get that can back, I'd rather be safe than sorry. Say hi to your folks for me."

Leroy turned to go, picked up his rifle and put the sling over his shoulder, and walked back down the roadway. Lonnie watched him as far as she could, then stayed in position another 15 minutes in case he came back. Right before full dark, she got up and carefully made her way back to the house. When she got where her mom could see her, she called out "Mom, I'm coming in." Nellie appeared to visibly relax and pointed the barrel of her shotgun straight up. When Lonnie reached her, Nellie gave her daughter a big hug, and broke down crying. "I've never been so scared in my life, if Leroy would have taken another step, I would have shot him."

"Mom, if he'd taken that step, he deserved to get shot! I had him in my crosshairs all the time, and if he made 1 funny move, I was prepared to blow his brains out."

"It's going to take a while for me to get used to this."

"I know mom, you should have seen my reaction when James wanted to teach me to shoot, I acted like he asked me to help him rob a bank. It's hard to contemplate taking someone's life, but as James pointed out, when someone attacks the innocent, they're forfeiting their lives, and all you're doing is protecting your life, or an innocent person's life. Right now, you can't let anyone get too close to you that hasn't been in strict quarantine for the last 2 weeks." Nellie handed her the shotgun, and she emptied the magazine, then pressed the action release, cycled the action to extract the slug, then closed it. Lonnie pulled the trigger with the barrel pointed in a safe direction, then reloaded the magazine and replaced the slug round on the sidesaddle. They went inside, and Lonnie hung the shotgun up on the coat rack while Nellie started dinner. Lonnie put her AR-15 and LBV back up, then washed up for dinner. Dinner was stew again, but Lonnie didn't mind. She read her bible until she got tired, then they had an Elderberry Extract "Nightcap" before going to bed.

The next morning before breakfast, Nellie suggested Lonnie go hunt another deer since winter was only a couple of months away, and they had plenty of jars left.

Lonnie put her kit together, then drove to the same herd she hunted last time. There was a bigger buck with the herd this time, but she could see it wasn't the prime buck, who was busy chasing does. As she steadied up to take her shot, she realized she couldn't guarantee a neck/shoulder shot as much as the deer was moving around, so she aimed for the deer's heart. When the trigger broke, she knew she hit the deer, but the deer didn't go down in a heap like last time. She decided to put up her AR, this could be a long hunt to locate the wounded deer, who would hopefully bleed out before he ran too far. While she was there, she got her game carrier and drank some water. Once half an hour had passed, she walked to where the deer was hit, saw the huge spray of blood around the area, and knew she hit something vital, and started following the blood trail. Half an hour later, she came across an old farmer's barb wire fence, and she could see the deer on the other side. In her haste, she decided she could navigate the fence without cutting it, got the carrier on the other side, then stepped over it, right into a rabbit hole, and fell down on her face.

When she woke up, her foot was tangled in the barbed wire and blood was oozing from where the barb had broken the skin. She was grateful that Nellie insisted she keep her tetanus vaccines up to date, and worked to extract herself. Finally she remembered she had her Ontario M9 on her, and it had a wire cutter built into the sheath. She got the sheath off her pistol belt, set the knife and sheath up to cut wire using the back edge which had a chisel grind that was designed to cut wire, and reaching up and back, snagged the wire with the hook, and severed the wire. With the tension released on her ankle, her leg fell back down, and feeling rushed to the foot, causing her to suppress a scream of pain. She sat up, untangled the ankle carefully so she wouldn't cause any more damage, then took the first aid kit out of her butt pack, cleaned the wound with an alcohol prep and a Betadine wipe, then bandaged it with a Neosporin coated 4x4 and wrapped it with an ACE bandage to support the ankle, which had started to swell as the pressure was relieved.

When she was finished with all that, she realized she still needed to get the deer, and cut the fence down the rest of the way since it was obviously abandoned, and instead of dragging the deer to the truck, used the carrier as a crutch, hobbled to the truck, locked it in 4WD mode, and drove carefully as close to the deer as she could, and after a struggle, got the deer into the truck. This one was much heavier than the other one, and she thought "Nice move Lonnie, shoot the monster buck

THEN twist your ankle!” When she quit whining, she got the deer in the bed of the truck, closed the bed, then hobbled to the driver’s side door, and carefully got inside. She hated the fact that Nellie’s truck was a stick shift, then she berated herself, “Be glad she’s got a truck, or you’d have to haul the deer all the way back home with your twisted ankle - Next time be more careful!” Stepping on the clutch sent a new wave of pain through her ankle, so she drove all the way home in first gear. When she got home, she pressed the clutch just hard enough to pop the transmission into neutral, then sat there with the engine running. The next thing she knew, Nellie was helping her out of the cab, and into the house.

Nellie helped her inside, laid her on the couch, and handed her an ice bag out of her small freezer. Nellie propped her ankle up on several pillows, draped the ice bag over her ankle, then gave her 1000mg of Advil. Nellie told her not to worry about the deer, she’d take care of it. Lonnie was soon asleep on the couch, and Nellie was out front wrestling with a huge buck. First she mounted the gantry device, attached the gambrels to the deer’s hind legs, and hoisted him aloft, then got a 5-gallon bucket under him. When she was all set, she slit his jugular veins and allowed him to bleed out. Once he bled out, she replaced the bucket with a large sheet of plastic, then taking her skinner, cut the deer open from neck to butt, and started skinning and gutting the deer. She saved the useable organs, and threw the rest into the blood bucket, which got dumped into a hole near her compost pile where all the garbage was dumped, and put the lid back on it before the smell knocked her over. She let the deer hang and cool while she went inside, washed her hands, and checked on Lonnie, who was out like a light.

It was getting cool outside, and the meat had cooled enough to section and bone the deer right there, so she put another piece of plastic over the bed of the truck, and used it for an improvised table. She sectioned the meat, and deboned it, then wrapped the good meat up and carried it inside. Finally she dumped the rest of the deer’s body into the garbage hole, put the lid down, and walked away. She cleaned off the truck and parked it back in the garage, then went inside to rest. By now Lonnie was up and insisting that she was OK to help her mom, so Nellie helped her sit at the table and cut the meat into pieces small enough to fit into the jars, while Nellie got a fire in the stove, and when the stove was hot, she moved a pot onto the hottest spot on the stove to boil water for the lids. With the lids boiling, she started assembling the canner, then cleaned and inspected the jars to make sure there were no chips or defects in the jars.

Next she started a pot of brine to fill the jars with, then started handing jars to Lonnie, then when they were full of meat, she filled them with brine and set them in the canner. She used the tongs to carefully set the lids down, then screwed the rings finger tight and closed the canner. Moving it to the hot spot on the stove, she started the timer once the pressure reached the recommended level, and kept moving the canner to keep the pressure constant. Once the timer went off, she took the canner off the heat, and when it had cooled, she tripped the pressure relief valve. Once it was safely cooled, she opened the lid, and removed the jars with the jar lifter and set the jars on the counter to cool to room temperature. As they cooled, she heard a series of musical pings as she readied the canner for the next batch. Over the rest of the day she canned the rest of the deer meat, then made sausage of the rest. When they were finished filling jars, she helped Lonnie back to the couch, got her situated, and went back to her canning.

Lonnie woke up later that evening when Nellie told her dinner was ready. She was salivating to the smells of roast venison and rustic mashed potatoes from Nellie's garden. She had a whole pile full of potatoes in a potato bin in a cool dark part of the house, and she made sure she used them up before they sprouted eyes. Instead of fresh butter, she used her huge stores of butter buds, and reserved the goat milk for making cheese and yogurt. Years ago, when Nellie showed Lonnie her storage, she was amazed that anyone could or would want to store that much food. One room of her house was stacked floor to ceiling with 5-gallon buckets full of rice, oats, wheat berries, various beans, powdered milk, scrambled egg mix, pancake mix, Bisquick, Butter Buds, instant mashed potatoes, honey, raisins, real maple syrup, sugar, salt, pepper, various seasonings, baking powder, yeast, baking soda and shelves full of cleaning supplies, paper products, clothing and fabrics. She was sure she was forgetting a couple of things her mom had stashed away. Her mom never ceased to amaze her by what she could find in storage. Lonnie really enjoyed dinner, then read her Bible with her ankle up on pillows, then they drank their medicine and went to bed.

The next morning, the swelling had gone down on Lonnie's ankle, but it still hurt. Nellie decided that another day with her ankle up wouldn't hurt. They changed the bandage after breakfast, and Nellie gave her some more Advil. Lonnie spent the rest of the day reading her Bible while Nellie took care of the chores. While she liked having her daughter around Nellie liked to be alone to have time to think

and meditate as well, and spent the rest of the day in peace and quiet. While she was out, Nellie found a tree branch that would make an excellent crutch, and brought it in at the end of the day. Lonnie was grateful for the crutch and thanked her mom, then they sat down to eat Dinner. With the crutch, she was able to walk around the house OK without help, so Nellie went back to surfing the Internet after dinner. The news wasn't good, and the death toll was rising in the US and the rest of the world.

H5N1 had spread all across the US in the month since the first outbreak in Las Angeles. They never did figure out who Patient Zero was, but whomever he was, he really got around by how many people were infected in the second wave of infections. What scared Nellie to her core were reports of a 50% fatality rate, and the fact that several doctors and nurses had died as well before the CDC notified them to enact their Infectious Disease Protocols. Due to the fact that H5N1 carriers could transmit the virus to others 1 week before they would show symptoms, most people were infected without knowing they were infected until it was too late, and tragically infected the rest of their family and friends before they became symptomatic. Mercifully, the disease killed fairly quickly, and most patients who couldn't make it to the hospital were dead within 24 hours of showing symptoms. The mass fatality event caused it's own Infectious Disease nightmare since there were too many bodies, and not enough people left to bury them, and several people received secondary infections from bodies contaminating water, and died from e-coli or Cholera infection, and some of them further spread the disease when they died. Homeland Security was powerless to stop the event, and INS was amazed to report a massive reversal of the flow of Illegal Aliens back into Mexico. Unfortunately several of them were infected, and spread the disease throughout Mexico, where the lack of healthcare caused a near-100% fatality rate among the infected.

In DC, a strange thing occurred. While he gave lip service to fighting the disease, President Bush was more worried about the shortage of Tamiflu to keep all the Ruling Elite healthy than the millions of poor people who were dying worldwide. He had been in touch with world leaders, who were debating moving to their shelters. George vetoed the idea saying they needed to stay with their capitol for their plans to work, or someone might usurp power from them while they were gone. He could just see the Joint Chiefs declaring Martial Law while he was stuck in Mt. Weather.

Chapter 5

Over the next couple of weeks, Lonnie's ankle got better, and Nellie asked her if she were up to chopping some wood - she needed to refill her "green wood" pile in the garage. Every year she harvested twice as much wood as she would need to burn, and stored it in the green wood pile in the garage, then took the old seasoned wood into the house and stored it to burn that season. She'd been snowed-in before, and if it weren't for her huge supply of in-house wood, it would have gotten mighty cold. The house was warmer than a conventional house, but even 6 feet of dirt only provided so much insulation when it was below freezing outside for weeks on end. While they were at it, she needed to winterize her truck, Lonnie's Jeep, and the 4WD ATV she used as a snowplow. Lonnie smacked herself, she could have taken the ATV and a small trailer instead of burning all the diesel it took to drive her mom's big truck all the way over there and back. She sat her mom down and told her "Mom, you need to remind me to conserve fuel, I forgot all about the ATV. I could have driven right up to that deer with the ATV and trailer, and hauled him back here to butcher him instead of burning all that diesel. Hopefully you got your diesel and gasoline tanks filled and treated before the stuff hit the fan?"

"Of course dear, I top it up every time I get a disbursement check from the bank. They pay me interest quarterly on my deposit, and I keep the gasoline and diesel tanks topped off. I got the biggest tank they'd sell me, 5,000 gallons of each so I could get their Jobber pricing. Both tanks were just filled 2 months ago, and I added the Pri to both tanks, so they're good for a year, and I've more in storage to treat them next year. I've got enough supplies to do my own oil changes on everything, and enough tune-up parts for your jeep, the ATV and the snowmobile to last 10 years at the least. I had the snowmobile and ATV dealer ship me a shop manual, any specialized tools, and a complete parts kit. I had the guy at NAPA send me the tune-up parts for your Jeep, a complete mechanic's tool kit, any parts he thought I might need for my old diesel truck, and a 55-gallon drum of oil with a transfer pump. Evidently I'm not the only person out here that requested them, since he knew exactly which parts to order."

Lonnie was grateful her mom was a Pack Rat and a prepper. She remembered when her mom ordered the tanks, and how much bitching and moaning the contractor did when she insisted they be buried 20 feet below grade. The

contractor kept making cracks about “digging to China” but Nellie knew that the deeper she buried the tanks, the less chance they’d gel in the winter. To make sure, she parked the earth-sheltered garage on top of the tanks which would hopefully keep the dirt on top of the tanks warmer. She asked the distributor if he could put some anti-gelling additives in the diesel, and anything the gasoline would need besides Pri-G for long-term storage in a cold environment. He said he already took care of that before they delivered the fuel when he realized that the fuel would be stored for a while. Nellie liked her old diesel truck, and was glad that it was old enough to not have a computer, and it had mechanical injectors. She was worried that the Air Resources Board would figure out a way to make her junk her truck since it was so old. They’d previously declared older gasoline powered cars “gross polluters” and had the owners junk them.

“Lonnie, we need to take the truck to harvest wood, I’ve got a permit to remove beetle-damaged wood from a huge stand of trees about 10 miles from here. If we cut the trunks to 8-10 foot lengths, we can load them in the truck, and cut them all at once to length and split them. Normally I have to do this alone, and sometimes Deputy Smith helps, but with you here, this should be fairly easy. I need to cut 5 cords of wood, which is twice what I need, but I might as well get what I can while I can. I bought a new chainsaw, all the safety gear, a double-bit and a single-bit axe to limb any trees that need it, and I’ll bring both gas trimmers with the brush blades to make clearing the underbrush go quicker.”

“Sounds like fun mom!”

“Always a wise guy!”

It was getting colder out, so they both wore Levis and flannel shirts. Lonnie reminded Nellie to wear her E&E kit, and she picked up the shotgun on the way out of the door. When they loaded the gear in the truck, Lonnie was glad that Nellie volunteered to drive. Pushing on the clutch still caused her some pain, especially the super-stiff clutch on her mom’s truck. They drove almost 10 miles, turned down another CDF fire road, drove another mile, then pulled over. Lonnie was glad to see the clearing her mom had previously worked right next to the road. They got out, cleared the debris, then cut the chaparral and stacked it off to the side, then Nellie told Lonnie only to fell trees marked with a bright orange slash, indicating that the tree had been marked for removal. She said to be careful, some

of those trees might be rotten, but so far, she'd been lucky. They put on their safety gear, and headed to opposite sides of the clearing, and spent the rest of the day dropping trees. Once they had a truckload, Nellie waved at Lonnie, and they stopped cutting, and started cutting the tops off the trees where most of the branches were. When they finished, Nellie surprised Lonnie, disconnected the winch from the front of the truck, connected it to the rear receiver and plugged the power lead and the control module, connected a choke collar to a nearby tree, and free-spoiled the winch out. When everyone was clear, she flipped a switch and the winch pulled the log right up to the rear of the truck. Lonnie laughed and said "When did you get that?"

"Deputy Smith suggested it the last time I went to get wood. He said if I got an electrical receiver-mounted winch, I could mount it in front or back, and use it to haul wood to the truck instead of practically killing myself using muscle power."

"Sounds like Deputy Smith is a smart guy!"

"He's single too Lonnie, his wife died about 5 years ago - he told me it was cancer."

Lonnie could tell her mom was trying to fix her up, then remembered James was dead, and leaned on her mom's shoulder to cry for a minute. When she finished, she helped her mom top the trees and hook the choker cable to them and drag them to the truck. Between the two of them, they hoisted the front of each log into the truck, then slid the rest of the log into the bed. When they finished, it was dark enough to need the headlights driving home. As they drove in the driveway, Nellie spotted a familiar looking cruiser.

"What's he doing here mom?"

"I invited him for dinner. He's a typical male, and has problems boiling water. If he couldn't heat hot dogs in a microwave, he'd starve."

"Isn't that dangerous?"

"The Department's been shut down for 2 weeks now, and he's been living in his house by himself, so he's been through the quarantine period."

“Ok Mom, it’s your house, just please don’t try to fix me up. If I find someone, I’ll find them. If not, I’m happy living with you!”

“Thanks dear, but you really need a life of your own - I remembered that you wanted to have a family, and your biological clock’s ticking.”

“It’s not that bad mom, I don’t need to get pregnant next week!”

“Ok, but we do have a spare bedroom, and he’s got several years worth of food and supplies. We’d be way safer with him living here with us, instead of just the two of us. I can’t pick you up and carry you anymore if you’re hurt, and I doubt you could carry me very far. Having a man around the house even if it’s purely platonic would be a good idea.”

“OK mom - it’s your house.”

Nellie pulled the truck up next to the sawhorses, they still had to saw and split the wood tomorrow. Lonnie suddenly realized there WERE some good reasons to have a man around the house. She wasn’t looking forward to cutting and splitting a truck bed full of wood. When she walked up to Deputy Smith’s cruiser she was more friendly than she planned on.

“Deputy Smith - nice meeting face to face. Sorry about last time, I was behind the door with a shotgun in case you might be trouble.” Lonnie stuck her hand out without thinking, then Deputy Smith, who went by Gene around his friends shook Lonnie’s hand. They were already too close for safety if either one of them was infected, so he decided to take a chance. He quickly looked Lonnie over, and realized she was a very pretty woman. He saw all the wood stacked in the pickup, and realized she was strong too - his wife Abigail was like that too. They walked over to where Nellie was waiting for them on the porch. “Well I see you two have already been introduced. Dinner will be ready in half an hour, so I took the liberty of pouring 3 glasses of iced tea.” They sat down on the porch and talked a while. Gene filled them in on what was going on in the county, the state, and the world as he knew it. Nellie’s information on the internet was pretty good, but Gene was privy to some LEO-only information via the Homeland Security grapevine.

“Don’t believe everything you read on the internet Nellie, especially if the source

is US News media. They're being spoon-fed information by the Homeland Security Department, and are under some pretty severe "National Security" restrictions about what they can report that they don't get from the HSD people. Something's not right about this whole Bird Flu thing. The first wave got excellent treatment in the hospitals, and most of them survived. The second and third waves are dying by the truckload without any medical care."

"Gene, I was reading on the internet that a large portion of Doctors and Nurses were infected in the end of the first round, and the rest refused to return to work."

"I read something about that too - I can't blame them, since the Sheriff told us to stop patrolling, it wasn't worth killing his deputies over. Once we were sure everyone was secure, we parked the rigs at our houses and settled in. I was amazed that the cell phones still worked when you called. I thought about your offer, and if Lonnie's OK with it, I'd like to take you up on it!"

"What offer Mom?"

"I offered Gene here a place to stay for the duration. It would be more secure with 3 adults than 2, and when you twisted your ankle, I realized the two of us needed help since I can't pick you up or carry you, and there's going to be more stuff around here that we could use a man's strength to do - especially if it gets any worse and we run out of fuel."

"Ok, Mom, you're right. Gene, how'd you like to be our roommate?"

"Let me check out the accommodations first."

"Gene, you've got your own room with it's own private bathroom, so you can leave the seat up or down as you see fit. The bed's a full-size hotel bed I got off the Internet cheap. It's practically brand-new, and I made sure to take off the frilly sheets and stuff. You will do your own laundry and hang it in your room to dry. I'll come up with a chores sheet, but don't worry, we won't ask you to cook!"

"Good, I hate pink sheets!"

When they were done drinking their iced tea, Nellie went inside to check on

dinner. With Nellie out of sight, Gene apologized to Lonnie “Sorry Lonnie. I think your mom’s trying to fix us up. Not that I mind, you’re a real pretty woman. I’m still getting over Abigail’s death, so I want to be your friend first, and let’s see what happens.”

“Works for me Gene. My live-in boyfriend was one of the first people to die from H5N1.”

“Really what did he do?”

“He was a UPS driver in Los Angeles.”

“Funny you should say that, the CDC theorized that a delivery driver might have been one of the first infected people judging by how rapidly it spread around LA County. They’re pretty sure he wasn’t Patient Zero since UPS drivers rarely travel outside the country.”

“That was weird, when I came home, there was a signed autograph from a famous LA model that said “To Lonnie, Love Nichole” and I knew that James got it for me. He delivers to the Galleria, and probably ran into her there.”

“Ok, that explains a few things. I don’t know how to tell you, but if that model had been overseas especially Asia any time soon, she could have picked up the bug and brought it back to the US. Anyone coming in contact with her would get infected. There’s a whole week between infection and symptoms, during which you can infect others by coughing or sneezing on them, or any close contact, or touching the same surface they touched.”

“Oh my God, James might have been Typhoid Mary!”

“I doubt it. James would never have known he was infected until it was too late, and if anything he was an innocent victim who just happened to come in contact with a lot of people. How’d you make it from LA to your mom’s place?”

“After James died, I tried to call in sick and didn’t want to go to work, but my boss begged me to - I’m a graphic artist and we’re always on a deadline. I went into work, and didn’t see anyone. I didn’t think anything of it until later that day when

I called the boss on his cell phone, and he was getting admitted to the ER. When I still didn't see anyone the next day, I called his cell, and a nurse answered the phone, saying he had died that morning. I hung up, and 5 minutes later the officer that handled James' death called and said James died from natural causes. We talked for a minute or so, and he advised me to go somewhere and isolate myself for a while. I thought of my Mom's place, and thanks to the "stay at home" orders over the radio, I made it all the way here with only 1 major incident when some trailer trash invited me to a party, and weren't about to listen to the word NO. When one of them pulled a Bowie knife, I shot him with my Colt Commander, and they split. I drove straight here, and the rest as you can say is history!"

"You are one lucky lady, you know that! We had reports all up and down I-80 of robberies, rapes and murders right up to the time I drove out to check on you and your mom. Good thing you were armed. Most of these Sheeple think it's our job to protect them, and refuse to protect themselves."

"I know, my Mom used to be 1 of them. The emergency, what happened to me, and your little speech convinced her that she needed to learn to defend herself. I've spent the last couple of weeks teaching her how to shoot the AR-15, the Mossberg 590, and her Colt Commander. You should see her with the shotgun, she looks just like Linda Hamilton in Terminator."

"This I gotta see, the last time I was here about 6 months ago, she looked at my sidearm like I was handling a snake."

Right then, Nellie walked out onto the porch, and couldn't understand what Gene was grinning for. "I came out here to tell you two dinner's ready." The 3 of them went into the dining room, sat down and ate dinner. Halfway through Gene said "I could get used to this, you cook better than Abigail. I'd be eating Microwaved hot dogs and chilli out of a can right about now!" Once dinner was over, they sat down and talked the rest of the evening, then they went to bed early when Nellie reminded Gene they get up at first light, and they had a lot to do tomorrow. Lonnie's groan told Gene that she wasn't looking forward to it, then remembered the load of wood in the back of Nellie's truck. He decided to turn in early, and said goodnight to the ladies. His bedroom was exactly as described, a nice full-size hotel bed with pale blue sheets, and medium blue towels, and a clear shower curtain. He picked up his overnight bag, set his stuff on the sink, got undressed,

took a shower, and crawled into bed.

The next morning, he awoke to the smells of breakfast and thought “I could really get used to this!” Nellie had made bacon and eggs. Maybe it was just a coincidence, but whenever they had hard chores to do, Nellie made bacon and eggs. Lonnie thought her mom might be trying to bribe her and Gene, but she wasn’t complaining. Gene showed up wearing jeans and a flannel shirt, and Lonnie was singing to herself “I’m a Lumberjack, and I’m OK...” Gene couldn’t figure out why she was grinning, and was afraid to ask. After dinner, they got things organized to cut the wood to length and split it. Gene volunteered to split the wood, which was the hardest work. He helped Nellie and Lonnie lift each log onto the sawhorse, then Nellie cut them to length with the chainsaw while Lonnie fed the log to her mom. Once they had a small pile of logs, Gene took the sledgehammer and a conical wedge and started splitting wood around the corner from them. Lonnie and Nellie alternated cutting wood, and stacking what Gene had split. Once the truck was empty, they all helped load the truck with split wood, then drove it to the garage and filled her green wood pile full, then unloaded the seasoned wood and loaded it back in the bed, then parked the back of the truck as close to the house as possible, then Nellie got her wheeled wood cart, and Gene hauled wood back and forth while Lonnie loaded the cart and Nellie unloaded and stacked it in her “wood room.” When they were finished, Gene said he had to get some stuff from his house, and asked if he could borrow Nellie’s truck. Nellie said “sure, but I’m exhausted.”

“Don’t worry Mom, I’ll help Gene, you take it easy and start dinner. We’ll be back in a while.” Lonnie reached around the door, grabbed her 12 gauge and the bandoleer of ammo, then stuck it behind the seat of Nellie’s truck, and said she was good to go. Gene looked at her, and realized she was wearing her E&E kit with the Colt Commander, so the shotgun would probably be enough firepower until he got his armory transferred to Nellie’s place. Lonnie was glad when he decided to drive, her ankle was bothering her, and the last thing she needed was to have to push in that heavy clutch. Gene started the truck, and they drove over to his place. Lonnie was amazed at how clean it was, then realized that Gene was still a guy, just a neat freak. They took several trips moving his clothing, personal stuff, and the last trip they took his armory. Nellie’s eyes got as big as saucers when they started unloading the Pelican cases and the crates full of ammo. When they finished, Nellie told them dinner was ready. After dinner, Nellie’s curiosity

got the better of her, and asked Gene what was in the cases and crates. He took out 1 of the Pelican cases, and told them that a friend of his in Supply got them for him when he quit the Air Force. "I used to be an MP, actually Air Police at Nellis Air Force Base."

"You worked at Dreamland?"

"Didn't get any where near it Lonnie, We were stuck out in the middle of the desert keeping an eye on the UFO watchers. The funny thing was we had the place so wired with sensors that if a Jack rabbit farted, we could tell where he was, which way he was facing, and what he had for dinner. The only reason we were out there was to be a visual presence to keep the politicians happy, who don't trust sensors. Even with the AC on, those trucks got hot in the summer. Finally I got tired of baking my brains out during the summer, and applied for an opening in the Sierra County Sheriff's office. I've been with the department for the last 5 years. It's a good compromise between what I was doing, and working in a big city department. The County gave us some nice 4x4 Jeeps as cruisers since we get a bunch of snow up here, and Homeland Security recently upgraded our radios and weapons. Anyway, I was just about to show you what was in the case. A friend of mine in supply got me 2 of these, and a bunch of stuff to go with them."

He opened the case, and the rifle looked like her AR-15, but about half the size, with some funny-looking stuff in the case next to it. Gene explained "this is a M4 SOPMOD kit which is like your AR-15, but much more compact and full-auto."

Nellie looked like she was about to have a fit "What the hell are you doing with full-auto weapons?"

"I was in the Air Police, remember, we always carried full-auto, and I carried the M4 in the truck since it was much shorter, and easier to use getting into and out of the vehicle."

Lonnie saw a big crate marked M433 HEDP and another marked M918 and asked Gene what they were. He said the M4 SOPMOD kit included a 40mm grenade launcher, and they were grenades for the launcher. He watched Nellie's eyes, and if it were possible, he could have sworn they were bigger than when he admitted he had full-auto weapons. He decided to head her off at the pass.

“Before you stroke out on me, let me give you a little infobit you might not be aware of. After 09/11, Homeland Security issued AR-15's with grenade launchers and grenades to the Sierra County Sheriff's office, and various departments in the US. Obviously the feds were expecting serious trouble to upgrade our law enforcement equipment to the same gear the Army has. All this stuff is Military Surplus that I could have gotten through my department.” Gene felt bad about lying to Nellie, but it was close enough to the truth - Homeland security was handing out less-than lethal grenades for riot control, not high-explosive rounds like the military had, but Nellie wouldn't know the difference. If they wanted the place to be secure, a couple of poodle shooters wouldn't do it. “Those AR-15's of yours are nice, but they aren't enough to repulse an organized attack. Even the M4/M203 combination is kind of under-gunned if we come up against armor, like if the ATF were to come here for any reason.”

Lonnie interrupted “Why would the ATF come here, none of our weapons are registered to Mom?”

“If I know those dirtbags, they're liable to hit the easy targets first, but they won't leave the small rural communities alone. I'll be able to keep my ear to the ground, but eventually this County will have to decide to either submit or resist if the Feds decided to throw the Constitution in the trash.”

“Why would they do that?”

“Nellie, you remember the quote about Absolute Power? If the President declares a National Emergency, he assumes virtually dictatorial powers. Very few men can resist the temptation. If H5N1 kills a lot of Americans, he could be justified in declaring a National Emergency and suspending most of the Constitution. That would be just 1 step short of Martial Law.

“It couldn't happen here, could it?”

Chapter 6

The next day after chores were done, Gene was going through the crate of grenades his friend Larry had shipped him. He assumed all 72 grenades in the crate were HEDP, but when he opened the crate, the individual cases had different numbers on them. Half of the cases were marked M406 HE, and the other half were marked M433 HEDP. He decided he could live with a mix of High Explosive Dual Purpose and High Explosive. Gene decided to keep Nellie out of the loop for now with the grenade launchers, since they upset her so much. Anyway, according to what Lonnie said, she'd be better off with his scoped M-1a shooting long distance. He decided the next time they went out shooting that he'd show her how to shoot his rifle, then take Lonnie off and show her how to use the grenade launcher and the M4. He was really glad his friend included 3 AN/PVS-4 night vision scopes since they weren't in all SOPMOD kits. He wasn't interested in the laser sights, or IR illuminators, all they did was show the bad guys with NVG's where you were. With the M203 mounted he didn't need the handle either. He liked the 4x ACOG sight, and the other mini red-dot sight, and usually left the 4x ACOG mounted unless they were shooting at night, then he'd either mount the Night Vision scope or the mini-red dot sight depending on how far away he was expecting them to be shooting MZB's. He wished he'd gotten his hands on some hand grenades, but as his Sergeant said "Wish in one hand..." One thing he could do immediately to improve their security was to dig 2 bunkers with the backhoe. Since they were for defensive use, he didn't see how Nellie could object. He packed the crates back up and went outside to talk to Nellie and Lonnie.

"Nellie, good thing I caught you, I was just thinking about security around here, and if I could dig and build 2 bunkers in your front yard, it would give us a secure location to fight from. I can make them so they're not obvious or an eyesore."

"Ok if you think it's necessary, go ahead."

"Do you have any sandbags?"

"I've got a bunch of gunny sacks, that work?"

"They should, the soil here's got a high clay content unlike desert sand, so it should stay in the bag. I hope you've got a backhoe?"

“It’s in the garage. By the way, sorry about yesterday, I’m still getting used to the idea of us being armed around here.”

“Since there’s only 2 M4/M203 combos, and you’re a better rifle shot then Lonnie, I was going to have you use my scoped M-1a instead of that poodle shooter, so you could engage targets out past 300 yards.”

“Why would we have to do that?”

“Say you were attacked by a bunch of Mutant Zombie Bikers carrying AK-47's. If you could engage them at 400 yards, they would have a hard time hitting anything since the AK’s basically outside it’s tactical range at that point, and if we were in bunkers, it would make it that much harder on them.”

“Ok, I get it, if we outrange our opponents, we can hit them, but they can’t hit us!”

“Bingo. It’s like Desert Storm - our tanks could engage the Iraqis at double their maximum range, and we were cleaning their clocks. We killed like 100 tanks for every 1 of ours lost, and most of them were damaged by mines. We didn’t lose 1 tank crewman in Desert Storm.”

“So what are those grenades for?”

“Thrown grenades have a range of 50-75 yards, the M203 has a maximum range of almost 300 yards. The HEDP round is effective against light armor like the Humvee, Armored Personnel Carrier, and the Bradley. All it will do against an Abrams is scratch the paint and get them mad. The High Explosive round is an anti-personnel round.”

“Ok, sounds like a plan, you and Lonnie take out the trash while I snipe at the leader and the guy with the radio.”

“How’d you know that?”

“TV and Movies can be very informative. Most of the movies I’ve seen, the sniper takes out the guy with the radio, or the pistol on his belt.”

“If you’re ok with being the designated sharpshooter, it simplifies things. If we’re all caught up on chores, would you like to go shooting this afternoon?”

“I don’t know where, we’ve only got a 100-yard clearing around here.”

“If you don’t mind a short ride, we could use the county range. I’m sure it’s deserted by now.”

“Ok, it will be a little snug in the truck, but that’s probably the best vehicle to bring.”

Gene went to go find Lonnie and make sure it was OK to go shooting today. She agreed in a heartbeat, and they loaded Nellie’s truck and drove to the Sheriff’s range on the other side of town. It was totally deserted when they got there, and they quickly set up targets at 100, 300, 400, and 600 yards for Nellie, and then Gene set up 2 targets at 100 yards for them, then dragged a target barrel out to right around 200 yards for them to learn how to use the grenade launcher. He had 2 cases of practice grenades, so they had 12 shots each to get their launcher sighted in and get used to firing it. Once everyone had their shooting glasses and hearing protection on, Gene uncased his M-1a and Nellie was curious about the beautiful scope mounted on it. Gene told her the dealer gave him a big break on the Burris Extreme Tactical 3x12x50 scope since it had been in inventory over a year, so he got a \$600 scope for less than \$400 including a set of QD rings, and installation. Gene had the rifle in a tactical case with 10 20-round magazines loaded with .308 Match ammo. He carried the rifle to the 100-yard target he set up for Nellie, and showed her how to use the rifle, and the best position. He left her with a 50-cal ammo box full of ammunition, and told her to keep shooting until she could get a 3-shot 1-inch group, then to see him and they’d move her to the 300-yard range.

Meanwhile, Gene and Lonnie took out the M4's and Gene double-checked the guns were empty, then showed Lonnie how to work the gun, and how to load and unload the M203 grenade launcher. He left the 4x ACOG sight mounted for now, since they were only going to be shooting at the 100 yard target. After about an hour, Gene could see that Lonnie wasn’t having any trouble putting 3-5 rounds in the 1" X-ring in semi-auto, so he decided to teach her how to shoot short bursts with the rifle. After a couple of hours, she was able to keep the whole burst in the

kill zone of the B-27 at 100 yards, which was what he wanted. Next, Nellie walked up and said she was ready to switch to the 300-yard target. Gene pulled a slip of paper out of his gun case, and checked the ballistic table, then told her to carefully add 16 1/4-moa clicks UP, and that should be a 300-yard zero. It took her a while, and when she was finished, Gene helped her get set up on the 300-yard line, and carefully sight in. Her first 3 shot group was about 6 inches in diameter.

Her first round was close enough to the center that he decided to take out the boresighter, and write down where the center of the crosshairs was pointed on the grid, then set the windage and elevation back to it's mechanical center, then took the rifle over to the truck, set it in a stock vise, and loosened the rear mounting ring, added a single shim, then sighted through the boresighter. It took him a couple of tries adding and removing shims until he got it just right, then he locked down the screws and checked again. Satisfied with his work, he told Nellie to take the rifle to the 300-yard target and try to put the first round through the bull's-eye. The first round was half an inch high and right, so he adjusted the scope, and told her to do it again. This time the first round went right through the bull's-eye. Nellie was wondering what the heck Gene was doing so he explained "I just set the mechanical zero of this scope to 300 yards instead of 100 yards. If you're going to be shooting outside of 300 yards, you would have run out of clicks by 400 yards using a 100-yard zero, so once you had your 300-yard zero, I reset the windage and elevation to their mechanical zero and remounted the scope so the crosshairs were pointing to the same spot. Now you have another 70 clicks of adjustment available. At 600 yards, with a 300-yard zero, you'll be 73 inches low according to my ballistic table, but with a 100-yard zero, you would have been over 105 inches low. A minute of angle at 600 yards roughly equals 6 inches, so 105 divided by 6 equals 17.5 minute of angle, and the scope clicks are 1/4 minute, so you'd need all 70 clicks. If you take a look at the chart, using a 300-yard zero makes sense, you're between 5 and 6 inches high from 100-200 yards, dead-on at 300, 14 inches low at 400, 38 inches low at 500, and 73 inches low at 600 yards."

"That just went over my head like a 747, but I can see the numbers on the table, and the 300-yard zero makes sense if I'm going to be shooting outside 300 yards anyway. If I zeroed at 400 yards, then the 100 and 200 yard numbers get much bigger."

“That’s called hold-over or hold-under. If it’s less than 6 inches, you can either shoot point of aim, and live with the difference, or you can use the mil-dot reticle to get an exact holdover/under.”

“So that’s what those little dots are for?”

“That and range estimation. I’ll teach you later, and I’ll teach you how to dope the wind. Any breeze can affect your shot. Luckily for you, I brought a really good book on long-distance shooting with me. You’re a much better rifle shot than I am, so this works out great. I’ve got to help Lonnie with the grenades, so just keep practicing and try to ignore any loud noises. Matter of fact, here’s some earplugs to wear underneath your earmuffs.”

Nellie put the earplugs in, and when she put the earmuffs back on, she couldn’t hear anything. 5 minutes later, she heard a dull boom off to her right, and a white puff of smoke went off about 30 feet from the can Gene had set out on the range. She went back to her shooting, and later that afternoon, her groups were down under 4 inches at 300 yards. She had shot all the ammo in the ammo can, and she was dog tired. Gene walked over, and helped her put everything back up, then Lonnie told her that Gene said she was doing really well, it usually took an experienced shooter years to shoot minute of angle groups outside of 100 yards, but for some reason, she seemed to be a natural shooter.

*** Somewhere East of Sacramento, CA***

Hector and Maria Ortiz may have immigrated illegally, but that didn’t mean they didn’t love their adopted country. When the first wave of Bird Flu hit the migrant workers, they packed up and instead of heading back to Mexico with everyone else, struck out Eastward in hopes of finding somewhere better to live. They had walked all the way from Central Mexico to the Sacramento area, and they were used to living in less-than ideal locations. Hector had managed to buy a sawed-off single-shot shotgun from an amigo of his for \$50 with a box of mixed 12 gauge rounds, including some buckshot, birdshot, and a few slugs. If he could have read the stamping on the barrel, he would have known the gun was older than he was. All he cared was the gun worked, and had managed to keep the banditos away.

He married Maria when they were still teenagers, and she was now a beautiful 20

year old woman. They didn't have any kids yet, but Maria kept trying to get pregnant. When she could get to a church, she lit a candle and prayed to the Blessed Virgin and asked for a son. They were from a poor Central Mexican town, and shortly after their wedding, her father gave her a piece of silver for bus fare for both of them to Tijuana, and told her that they should head North in search of a better life. Hector was a hard worker, and between the two of them managed to find enough work in Tijuana to pay the coyotes to take them north across the border. The coyotes charged them \$500 each, got them across the border, and dropped them off just south of the Border Patrol freeway checkpoint on I-5 between Del Mar and San Onofre. Having Camp Pendleton's Marines handy was a big plus for the Border Patrol. They avoided the Border Patrol by walking north until they reached San Clemente. They didn't travel fast, and they tried to get day work wherever they were. Often it would involve gardening, picking produce, or an occasional housecleaning job for Maria who was scared by the stories she'd heard of young beautiful Mexican girls getting kidnapped by their employers and sold as prostitutes, so she was very careful who she worked for.

They worked hard, and kept moving north. When they reached Dana Point, they needed to make a decision, East and North along the I-5 corridor that had a much heavier Immigration presence but a bigger Mexican population to blend into, or West along the coast, following 101 North through the Beach Cities, which were more affluent, but also had a lighter INS presence and fewer Mexicans. They had made it this far, and didn't want to get deported. Hector had a brother who said he could get them a good job in Sacramento if they made it that far. Sacramento was their goal, and they decided to avoid Los Angeles and the San Joaquin Valley. They moved from migrant worker camp to camp, always just staying 1 step ahead of the law enforcement and immigration. They had several close scrapes where sympathetic deputies simply told them to clean up the camp and move on without arresting them or calling the INS.

Maria got a very good paying job working as a maid in Marina Del Ray, but Hector couldn't find work except for day labor, so they were forced to move on. They both found excellent jobs in Malibu, and were tempted to stay until 1 day Hector's employer stiffed him for a week's wages, and told him if he complained, he'd turn him into "La Migra", a phrase that evoked the same fear in illegal Mexican American immigrants as "Your Papers Please" evoked in Russians during the heyday of the KGB. Hector decided that he'd be better off looking

elsewhere, and they pushed northward. They both found excellent work and an apartment in Mahou Riviera, and stayed almost a year before they were evicted from their apartment when the owner decided to sell the property and erect condominiums.

It took them almost a year to walk north along the Pacific Coast Highway working where they could, and sleeping in migrant camps. Hector was frustrated. He didn't have a son, and they didn't have a home either. He couldn't help feeling like a failure, and started drinking. Maria almost left him when he hit her one night when he was drunk. Fortunately she came back the next day, and they went to the next town to seek counseling from a Mexican Priest. He talked to the couple over the next couple of weeks, got Hector to stop drinking, and convinced them that it was neither of their fault they didn't have a son yet, and when God wanted them to have a son, they would. Maria cried, and after they attended Mass a couple of times, they wanted to stay, but there was no work since it was winter, and the gardening jobs were seasonal.

The parish priest put them in touch with a friend of his that owned a Mexican Restaurant in Port Hueneme just outside of Oxnard who needed help, and didn't care if they were illegal. He owned an apartment complex next door, and made a deal for room, board and cash for both of them. He could work as a dishwasher/cook/busboy, and she would work part time as a waitress in the evenings. He gave them an apartment rent free, 3 meals a day at the restaurant, and \$500 cash between the two of them, but they both would work long hours. The priest gave them a lift to his friend's place, and blessed the both of them. Hector was happy, they had a roof over their heads, 3 meals per day, and now maybe they'd be able to start a family. 6 months later, Maria announced she was pregnant, and Hector felt like celebrating. The owner, Ernesto, invited them to the restaurant for a special meal after hours, and after dinner, they went home.

3 months later, Hector's dreams were crushed when Maria lost the baby, and Ernesto lost the business. They were out of their house, and childless. It was the lowest point in Hector's life, but knew he must be strong for Maria, who was disconsolate at losing her baby. Hector realized that walking was hard on Maria, and that might have been why she wasn't getting pregnant, because she seemed to do much better when they had a steady job and a roof over their heads. Hector decided to take a risk, and checked into buying bus tickets to Sacramento instead

of walking. They had almost a thousand dollars in savings, and he thought that spending the money on bus fare would be a good investment. He hadn't heard from his brother in 2 years, and prayed he was still living in Sacramento.

The next day they boarded the bus, and later that afternoon, they arrived in Sacramento with everything they owned in 4 suitcases. He gave his Brother's last known address to a cabbie, who said he'd take him there for \$20, so he agreed. When they got there, the business was closed, and no one knew where his brother was. The cabbie felt sorry for them, and drove them to a fleabag motel for another \$5 and helped them check in, since Hector's English wasn't too good. The motel was cheap, so they could afford to stay there a week while Hector looked for his brother and a job. It took Hector a week to find a new job at a gardening company, then they moved into a cheap apartment that was nicer than the place they were staying. Maria got a job working as a housekeeper at another fleabag motel. He worked at the gardening job 6 months before the Bird Flu hit. They were evicted from their apartment, and left to travel east with what they could carry again.

Hector decided to stay off the main roads, he'd heard stories of banditos preying on refugees, and he knew the shotgun wasn't enough to protect them from a large group of bandits, so they decided to take the slow and easy route, and eventually work their way into Nevada, where they might find work when the Bird Flu ran out. He'd heard that a lot of Mexican laborers were headed South to Mexico, and when the flu was over, he hoped to get a good job while they were still in Mexico. Maria could make 3 times what she was making as a housekeeper in a big Reno casino, and they might even be able to get into an amnesty plan since they'd been in the US 5 years.

Chapter 7

Before they left Sacramento, Hector and Maria went shopping and bought food and supplies, and loaded the jogger as heavily as they could, then later they hitched a ride in a pickup headed to Auburn and wound up following the American River northeast from there. Following the advice of the Mexicans who dropped them off in Auburn, they entered the Auburn State Recreation area from Foresthill Road near Auburn and headed northeast along the North Fork of the American River. Hector knew they could camp along the river, and find fresh water. If they could locate some fishing gear, they could eat fish too. Maria and Hector decided not to seek work and stay away from strangers in case the mystery flu would find them. Hector was having a tough time making progress along the rough terrain around the American River, and was about to suggest an alternate route, when he found a small orange plastic box floating in the river, dove in and fished it out. It was a small traveler's fishing kit that must have fallen overboard off a boat. When he brought it back to camp, and opened it, they both knelt and gave thanks to God. Maria thought it was a miracle, and Hector couldn't argue. They made a primitive campground in the clearing next to the river using a few tarps, some sticks and twine that they had on them or scavenged in their travels. They were both excellent scavengers, and most of the things they had were collected out of the trash or off street corners. Maria found the baby jogger several weeks earlier in the trash and the only thing wrong with it was the fabric was torn. She was amazed at what these rich Gringos would throw out. She found some heavy canvas, and fixed the jogger so they could carry their belongings in it, which made their travel that much faster.

Hector figured out how to assemble the fishing kit while Maria built a keyhole fire in front of their tent, and got the griddle ready to make tortillas while she was cooking some beans and rice in another pot on the fire. When they first built their campsite, Hector dug a latrine with a cheap folding shovel he scavenged out of the trash, and stuck a roll of TP over the handle. He dug it as far into the woods as he thought was safe, and behind some bushes, remembering what an old migrant farm worker told him, he wanted to keep it as far away from the water as he could. Maria scrounged bars of soap from the motels she worked at, and used them and some rocks along the riverbanks to clean their clothes.

Several days later, Maria was wearing just one of Hector's shirts while doing the

laundry along the river, when she was spotted by a boatload of white trash straight out of Central Casting from the movie “Deliverance”. They whooped and hollered, and turned their boat straight for where Maria stood. Luckily for her, the outboard on the boat was small, and she was able to run into the woods behind the tent. Hearing the commotion, and the guttural and obscene comments from the trashy fishermen, Hector picked up his shotgun and the box of shells and hid behind a log with Maria, protecting her body with his. Motioning her to be quiet, he checked the chamber of the shotgun, and it was loaded with a 00 Buck round. Right as he closed the action as quietly as he could, the dirtbags beached their boat and made their way to shore yelling “Come Out, we won’t hurt you!” while one of their party licked his lips, and another made a crude pantomime of the sex act. Seeing this, the leader laughed and said “I get her first, then the rest of you can have what’s left.” then he pulled a revolver out of his filthy overall pocket, and the rest of his gang smiled knowingly, they’d done this before. She’d either submit or die.

Hector saw the revolver, and knew that these banditos weren’t taking no for an answer, so he decided to fire first, and hopefully the element of surprise would allow him to get them before they got to Maria, who was shaking like a leaf, but being quiet. Hector allowed them to come as close as he dared, so they couldn’t reach their boat before he got the lot of them. He knew that if there were any survivors, they’d be back with help, and he wouldn’t stand a chance. Their leader got within 20 feet from Hector when he pulled the trigger on the shotgun, and blew the leader’s chest apart, and wounded the scumbag right behind him. He flipped the lever, opened the action, reloaded quickly, and kept firing until all the dirtbags were down. He told Maria to stay where she was, and he went to finish off the survivors. Two of them weren’t fatally wounded, so he loaded a birdshot round, aimed at their heads, and finished the job. When he was sure they were all dead, he stripped the bodies of anything useful, including a nice Bowie knife, the leader’s revolver, which turned out to be a stainless .357 Magnum, but Hector couldn’t read the writing on the barrel, he just knew that it was a big revolver. He found a box of .357 Magnum ammo in the leader’s other pocket, and a small skinning knife on his belt.

Hector remembered Maria, and ran to her side, and held her while she cried. He ran to the tent, picked up a warm blanket and wrapped it around her when he realized she was nearly naked. She smiled and kissed her husband as he wrapped

the blanket around her shaking shoulders. When she stopped sobbing, he told her “We need to get away from here. We can use their boat to travel as far up river as it will take us, and hopefully far from this evil scene. I hope you understand, I had to kill those men, they would have killed us. If I would have let any of them live, they would have been back with reinforcements, and we would have been doomed.”

“Hector, my husband. I love you more than anything. You risked your life to protect mine, and killed all those evil men. They deserved what they got, so I’m not worried in the least about you killing them. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for protecting me.”

“Mi Esposa, I will give my life protecting you and our niños if I have to.”

“I know you will, my beloved. We need to get dressed and packed so we can leave this place, and head east while it’s still light.”

They broke camp, packed their meager possessions into the boat, and headed northeast. They made it several miles up-river before it started getting dark, and Hector spotted a good campsite. They had been traveling on a lake called Clementine Lake for the last hour, but they didn’t know it - they didn’t have a map. Hector’s site looked like a developed campsite with a pile of wood, a fire ring with a grill and an outhouse. They hadn’t seen anyone since they entered the recreation area except the men they killed, so Hector thought it was worth the risk. They made camp right before the light failed, and Maria got a fire going to make dinner. After dinner, they laid in their bedroll in the tent. Maria rolled over, and despite the lack of privacy because of the open tent, kissed her husband passionately then made love to him all night long.

The next morning, Hector looked around their campground, and realized that there was no cover within 100 yards, and if anyone like the banditos showed up, they were vulnerable.

“Maria, I know you like this campground and the conveniences, but it’s not safe. Look around, there’s no place to hide if any more banditos show up. We need to pack up, get in the boat, and keep traveling up-river to find a more secure campground.”

Maria was not happy having to leave this beautiful prepared campground, but she realized her husband was right. If some more banditos showed up, there was no place to hide, or if the policia or federales showed up, they'd be deported back to Mexico. "You're right, we need to leave. I'll help you pack." Maria didn't say a word to her husband while they packed the boat, and Hector knew she was unhappy leaving this beautiful campground, but he knew that staying there any longer than they had to was a huge unnecessary risk. Before they left, they filled their water containers from the tap, and loaded them in the boat. Finally when they were all packed, Maria got in the boat, and Hector pushed it off the beach and climbed in himself, then carefully made his way to the stern of the boat, pulled the starter cord, and when the small outboard started, he twisted the throttle, and turned the boat up-river. They rode on the lake for another hour, and as they got closer to the Northeast end of the lake, the terrain started changing again, and they were in a canyon. Hector kept pushing Northeast until later that afternoon, they came to a fork, and he took the larger one to the south. hopefully he stayed on the main river. An hour later, the canyon walls opened up again, and he spotted a large clearing that looked suitable for a long-term campsite. There was plenty of downed wood, a large clearing, and most of all, a large expanse of beach, which meant a shallow sloping bottom so they wouldn't step immediately into the middle of the river. The canyon walls were a long ways off, so he hoped this section of the river didn't flood, but they'd keep the boat handy just in case. Hector told Maria that they could make a permanent camp here, they might have to look for an abandoned house to live in when it got closer to winter. They couldn't live where they were in a tent all winter, they'd freeze to death.

Sierra County, CA

When they got back to Nellie's house, Lonnie helped Gene unpack and clean the rifles while Nellie made dinner, giving Gene and Lonnie a chance to talk privately.

"Your mom's a really good shot. I re-zeroed the scope for 300 yards, so she should be able to use that scope setting for anything from 100-300 yards, and I've got a sheet here with the drop adjustments for that scope for 400-600 yards."

"Wow, that's a long ways off, why do you need to have the data for 600 yards, the biggest clearing around here is maybe 300 yards?"

“Let’s say we’re forced to bug out, and take shelter on a hillside with a commanding view. If your mom had the setting for 600 yards, that would command a lot of territory. Our M4/M203 combos have a maximum effective range of 300 yards, so if your mom engages everything outside 300 yards, we can clean up the stragglers when they get close enough to engage.”

“Ok, makes sense to me. James’ Mutual Assistance Group built a bomb shelter/retreat in the Angeles Forrest, I wonder if anyone made it there?”

“Hopefully it’s well hidden, that area would be crawling with LA refugees.”

“Yeah, you’re probably right. Now that I think about it, they’re probably dead since James took Rick to the basketball game the night before their MAG meeting, so they were probably all infected.” Lonnie leaned on Gene’s shoulder to cry, and he wrapped his arms around her. She cried for a while, then when she dried her eyes, she looked into Gene’s and saw he was smiling at her. She hoped she could fall in love again, Gene was really sweet. They finished up cleaning and putting up the rifles right as Nellie said dinner was ready. They went to wash up, then seated at the table. Nellie surprised them when she asked if it were OK to say grace. They all nodded so she began.

“Bless, O Lord, thy gifts to our use and us to thy service; for Christ's sake. Amen.”

Nellie was pleasantly surprised to hear 2 “Amens” echo hers, they both looked at Gene who said “I was raised Episcopalian, and I recognized that Grace out of the Book of Common prayer. I hadn’t said grace for years, thanks Nellie.”

Lonnie spoke up next, “Nellie had me start reading her Bible when I came up here a couple of months ago. I wasn’t raised in a church, but from what I’ve been reading, I definitely want to join and get baptized when this is all over.”

After dinner, Nellie fired up her computer, surfed the web, and realized there were no Episcopalian Churches within 25 miles of them, and the nearest church she might be interested in was the Sierraville Community Church, almost 10 miles away from them in Sierraville. She bookmarked the page, and just to be on the

safe side, wrote down all the contact information including their address, phone number, and service schedule. She walked in the living room, and saw Lonnie and Gene sitting close, reading her bible with Gene's arm around her shoulder. She was happy for her daughter. From what she knew, Gene would make a good husband. If they kept living there, things might get crowded if they wanted to raise a family, but there was no reason for them not to move back to Gene's house after the emergency was over.

The next morning after breakfast, Gene started digging the bunkers with the backhoe while Nellie and Lonnie took care of the animals and watered the garden. When they finished, Lonnie helped Gene fill sandbags and construct the bunkers. Once they had a low wall of sandbags, Gene piled the excess dirt in front of the sandbags just below the observation and gun ports, then they went and cut some more trees, laid them across the top, and covered them with 2 layers of sandbags for some protection from air bursts or grenades. Nellie got a bag of grass seed and seeded the tops and the fronts of the bunkers so hopefully next spring the bunkers would look like a natural hillside instead of a bunker. Gene was glad they had the backhoe, or it would have taken days to weeks to construct the bunkers instead of most of 1 day. Gene was telling Lonnie that the bunkers were more defensive than Observation Posts, so he made the ports as small as he could, and the door was in the back of the bunker facing the house. He told her that they should stand up to 30-caliber rifle fire, and maybe 50 caliber fire, and the roof would protect them against grenades, or a near-miss by mortar or shell fragments. If a mortar or shell landed on their roof, they'd be strumming harps! Gene wished he could do more to improve their security, but anything else he could do would either involve high explosives or be too overt and obvious.

Over the next 6 months, Gene and Lonnie grew closer together, and were starting to get bored with the enforced confinement. As winter set in, they were forced to spend most of the winter indoors in close quarters. Finally one day, Gene was helping Lonnie do the dishes, and accidentally bumped into her face to face. She smiled, reached her arms around Gene and kissed him. He was surprised, but seconds later, his arms came around her, and he was kissing her back. Nellie walked into the room and coughed discretely. "Glad to see you two getting along so well, don't let me interrupt" and she walked back out to use the computer. Gene broke the clinch, and looking in Lonnie's eyes, reached a decision, got down

on 1 knee and asked her “Lonnie, will you marry me - I know I love you, and I want to spend the rest of my life with you.” Lonnie picked him up off his knee, laid a passionate lip-lock on him and said “Of course Gene, I was wondering what took you so long?”

“I thought you were still in mourning for James, so I decided to wait until you were ready.”

“I’ve been ready for the last month. What do you want to do, there’s no preacher around, and I don’t want to wait another 18 months for the honeymoon.”

Nellie had been listening to their conversation, and walked in again. “How about if I marry you. I’m not a minister, but the important thing is the vows to each other. If you want to when this is over, we can check the local community church out and see if their Pastor will marry you.”

“Isn’t that kind of like living together Mom?”

“If you do a little research, there weren’t many Priests in the Middle Ages, and by the time he got around to officially marry the couples, some of them had 4 or 5 kids. It’s the vows you take, and the public commitment you make to each other.”

“Well if that’s the case, is after lunch too soon Gene?”

Gene kissed his bride-to-be, and they made preparations for the wedding. Nellie got on the Internet, and pulled up the Online Book of Common Prayer, and printed off the relevant pages.

At the stroke of noon, they met in the living room, Gene and Lonnie were holding hands as Nellie read from the printed pages.

“Dearly beloved: We have come together in the presence of God to witness and bless the joining together of this man and this woman in Holy Matrimony. The bond and covenant of marriage was established by God in creation, and our Lord Jesus Christ adorned this manner of life by his presence and first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. It signifies to us the mystery of the union between Christ and his Church, and Holy Scripture commends it to be honored among all people.

The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and, when it is God's will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord. Therefore marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God.

Into this holy union Gene and Lonnie, now come to be joined. If any of you can show just cause why they may not lawfully be married, speak now; or else for ever hold your peace.”

Nellie looked right at each of them as she read the following:

“I require and charge you both, here in the presence of God, that if either of you know any reason why you may not be united in marriage lawfully, and in accordance with God's Word, you do now confess it.”

Nellie took their silence as a good thing, and continued. She turned to Lonnie and said:

“Lonnie, will you have this man to be your husband; to live together in the covenant of marriage? Will you love him, comfort him, honor and keep him, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, be faithful to him as long as you both shall live?”

Lonnie looked at Gene and smiling said “I Will!”

Nellie turned to Gene and asked if he consented to be married:

“Gene, will you have this woman to be your wife; to live together in the covenant of marriage? Will you love her, comfort her, honor and keep her, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, be faithful to her as long as you both shall live?”

Gene answered Nellie in a strong voice “I Will!”

Nellie handed them each a piece of paper with their vows, and told them to face each other.

Gene took Lonnie’s right hand, and read from the sheet.

“In the Name of God, I, Gene, take you, Lonnie, to be my wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death. This is my solemn vow.”

Lonnie read her vows when Gene was finished:

“In the Name of God, I, Lonnie take you, Gene, to be my husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death. This is my solemn vow.”

When they finished their vows, Nellie smiled, and told them to join hands.

“Now that Gene and Lonnie have given themselves to each other by solemn vows, with the joining of hands, I pronounce that they are husband and wife, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Those whom God has joined together let no one put asunder.”

Both Gene and Lonnie responded “Amen” then Gene gave Lonnie a pretty passionate kiss.

“You two want to get a room?”

Gene and Lonnie nearly fell down laughing. When they stopped laughing, they went into Lonnie’s room to start their honeymoon while Nellie busied herself outside. She was glad that Lonnie was finally happy, and she wished them a long life together. She remembered her wedding day, and how handsome her husband was. She wasn’t bitter, just disappointed. Norbert was a handsome man, and realized he was too handsome, and might have been leading a double life before she knew him.

Later that evening, Nellie made a special dinner for the 3 of them, then Lonnie and Gene made themselves presentable and sat down for dinner. After dinner they went back in Lonnie’s room to finish what they started. Nellie worked on the computer until she was ready for bed, glad that they were keeping the noise down.

Chapter 8

As winter approached, Hector and Maria knew they had to seek shelter, and traveled further and further east until they found themselves on a dirt road which they decided to follow since it should lead them to a house. Right then Gene and Lonnie were returning from cutting trees with Nellie's truck. The slowed then stopped when they saw the Mexican couple standing by the road. Hector's head hung down in defeat, he wasn't paying attention, and allowed the truck to see them, now there was no point in running. Between Gene's Spanish and Hector's broken English, their story came out. They had been living on the American River in isolation since the Bird Flu epidemic and needed a place to stay. Gene talked with Lonnie, and told her that there were several abandoned cabins in the neighborhood that would give them a good shelter for the winter, and next spring, they could decide what they wanted to do. Lonnie nodded, so Gene turned to Hector and said "There are several abandoned Cabins in the area. We'll put you up in one of them for the winter, and you can decide what you want to do next spring. My guess is things won't be returning to normal anytime soon in Reno, so you might be better off here in the cabin gardening and hunting."

Hector turned to Maria and told her in rapid-fire Spanish that they were going to put them up in an abandoned cabin for the winter and not turn them into INS. Maria fell on her knees weeping in gratitude "Gracias a Dios!" Gene dropped the tailgate, and helped them load their luggage and climb aboard. Gene saw Hector's shotgun, and hoped they could find some better firearms at the cabin. Once they were aboard and the tailgate locked, they drove down the fire road, turned down another driveway, and stopped in a clearing next to a large cabin owned by a couple of wealthy skiers that didn't make it. Gene reached under a rock, removed the front door key, opened the door, and looked around quickly with his flashlight. There was no one and nothing there. He stepped back outside and helped Hector unload the pickup while Lonnie and Maria looked the place over. Lonnie surprised Gene when she started conversing in Spanish with Maria. After a few laughs, Lonnie told Gene that she told Maria the cabin was theirs to use for the winter, and if they decided to stay there permanently, they would need to plant a garden in the spring. They'd stop by after the snow melted to check on them. Lonnie and Maria checked the cupboards, and were surprised to find at least 6 months worth of staples, canned goods, canning jars, a large canner, spices, sugar, salt and everything they'd need to spend the winter. Maria's smile could have lit

the room by itself.

The two of them could live comfortably all winter here, and the house was so nice she didn't want to leave and go to Reno, and she told Hector. He agreed that if they could raise a garden and shoot some deer, they could live here for years. While they were talking, Maria noticed one of the floorboards was loose, and picked it up to discover it was a secret entrance to their basement. Gene went down first with his flashlight, and felt a wall switch. When he flipped it, the lights came on, and he shut his light off. "No way - it can't be!" was Gene's first thought as he surveyed the room. There was a huge shelf full of long-term storage food, another full of supplies packed for long storage, and in the corner was a Homak gun safe with the key hanging on the lever.

In the other corner was the reason the lights came on - an Outback battery bank and inverter setup. He opened the safe, and they had a nice assortment of guns and ammo ranging from a .308 turnbolt, M 1 .30 Carbine, a Mossberg 590 with the extended magazine, a Ruger 10/22 with a bunch of 25-round magazines, and a couple of Cowboy Action lever actions, including a .357 Magnum carbine and a case of .357 Magnum rounds. In the back, Gene saw a holster with 2 single-action .357 revolvers. Hector took a pistol out of his pocket and handed it to Gene, and Gene explained they took the same ammo. Hector nodded understandingly. They had enough weapons and ammo to easily defend the place. Gene closed the gun case back up, handed Hector the keys, then looked around the basement. Next to the battery bank was a 5KW diesel generator, and Gene traced the fuel line from the generator out the wall, and realized they had a buried diesel tank for the generator. Before they went back upstairs, Hector spotted gardening tools and a 5-gallon bucket full of non-hybrid seeds. They climbed back up the ladder, and Gene checked around the back, there were 4 Air-X wind turbines, and the roof was covered with Solar Panels. Gene explained to Hector that once the snow covered the roof, the panels wouldn't make electricity, but they got so much snow that it didn't make sense to try to keep it clear. The 4 turbines would produce about 1600 watts of power, so they had to restrict electric usage during the winter. Gene had spotted a big masonry heating stove with a large cooktop while they were in the cabin, and told Hector he needed to cut a lot of wood to keep them warm and cook on for the winter. Gene offered to come over tomorrow and show him how to cut and split wood for their stove.

Gene and Lonnie checked to make sure Hector and Maria had enough wood and supplies for the night, and bid them goodbye - they had to get back home, it was getting dark.

When they reached Nellie's place she said "Where have you two been?"

"You've got some new neighbors mom, We found an Illegal Mexican couple walking along the road. They were looking for a place to spend the winter, and Gene decided to put them up in the Wilson's cabin since they're not here. It took us this long to show them around and get them set up. You should see the place, they're almost as well prepared as you are. Hector's going to be busy cutting wood to keep that big cabin warm."

"Nellie, you'd like them, they're in their early 20's and according to Hector, they've been on the move since they crossed the border 5 years ago. They seem to be really good people. I was going to go over tomorrow and show Hector how to fell some trees. Lonnie if you want to, you can teach Maria how to shoot."

"I guess this means I get to tend the animals and the garden all by myself tomorrow?"

"Mom, you've been doing it for years. It will only take a couple of days for us to get Hector and Maria set up for the winter. If you want to come over and meet them later this week, we can bring you over."

"Dang, that reminds me, I left a bunch of handy talkies at my place. They've got electricity, and we could use 1 at each place and 1 in the vehicle to keep in touch. I've got a bunch of FRS/GMRS radios that should reach that might be better. I'll bring them both, and if the FRS radios have the range, I'll use the HT's for something else. Lonnie, remind me to go over to my place first tomorrow and pick up the radios. Nellie, can we borrow your chainsaws, axes, etc."

"Sure Gene, whatever you need."

"Mom, when you're here by yourself tomorrow, make sure you have your E&E bag on you at all times, and keep the shotgun handy just in case."

“By handy, I’m assuming you want me to keep it in the garden with me.”

“Nellie, it’s a stainless steel shotgun, a little dirt, mud or water isn’t going to hurt it.”

“Ok Gene, I guess I’ll feel better having it close at hand anyway.”

The next morning, they loaded Nellie’s truck, drove over to Gene’s place, picked up the radios, and drove back to Hector and Maria’s place. As they drove up the driveway, Gene could see Hector standing in the doorway with the Mossberg 590 at port arms and thought “Good, he’s learning.” As soon as Hector recognized Gene, he relaxed and put the shotgun inside the door and walked out to greet them. When they stopped, everyone exchanged greetings, and Gene asked Hector if it were OK for Lonnie to teach Maria how to shoot the M -1 Carbine and the lever action while they were cutting wood. Hector looked at Maria who was nodding vigorously, so Gene and Hector went to cut wood while the girls got set up to teach Maria how to shoot.

Lonnie had her work cut out for her, she knew Spanish, but hadn’t used it in years. Maria knew even less English than Hector did. It took her twice as long as it did with her mom to explain things, but luckily for her, Hector had taught Maria how to handle guns years ago and she remembered most of it. Lonnie was pleased to see that Maria treated every gun like it was loaded, and was very conscious of the direction the muzzle was pointed. Lonnie started Maria out with the .357 lever action shooting at targets 25 yards away. She found the easiest way to teach her was for Lonnie to do everything, then let Maria duplicate her actions while she explained why she was doing it in a mish-mash of English and Spanish, plus a lot of pantomime. Lonnie pointed the carbine at the 25 yard target, and fired 5 rounds, each of which struck the 5X zone. Lonnie handed the empty rifle to Maria, told her how to load it, and then she asked Maria to do what she did, and put 5 rounds in the center of the target. Maria looked nervous, but got over it after her first round hit the bull’s-eye. After about 100 rounds, she could consistently put all 5 rounds in the 5X, so Lonnie moved the target out to 50 yards and repeated the process. Maria’s first couple of rounds were low, so Lonnie said “Up” and pantomimed raising the barrel of the gun. Maria must have understood, because her next round was right below the bull’s-eye, and the next one hit the bull’s-eye.

Next Lonnie moved them back so the target was about 100 yards away. It took Lonnie much longer to shoot, but all 5 rounds were in the 6-inch 9-ring or better, which was good marksmanship for the little carbine and open sights. Lonnie made the suggestion that Maria hold her breath while she fired, and her first round was in the 8-ring low, and her next round was in the 9-ring low, so she knew how to correct the problem. Right when they finished shooting at the 100-yard target, Gene and Hector showed up in the truck. Maria pointed out her target to Hector, who shook his head and said “Madre de Dios!” he couldn’t believe his wife could hit a target that far away with open sights. Gene knew a good opportunity when he saw one, and borrowed the rifle from Lonnie, and after loading it, shot a 5-shot group into the 100-yard target that he could cover with his hand. Hector stood there amazed until Gene told him he could teach him to shoot like that, and the .308 rifle with the good scope would be a perfect rifle for shooting targets past 300 yards.

Hector mentally converted that distance in his head to meters, and muttered something under his breath that got him a stern look from Maria, and gales of laughter from Gene, who had seen the whole exchange and guessed at what Hector had said. Gene told Hector that Lonnie’s 50-year old mother was shooting 3-inch groups at 300 yards. He almost said something, then looked at Maria, and kept his peace. Obviously whatever he said last time was bad enough to make him go to confession if there was a Catholic Church nearby. The 4 of them unloaded the wood, then started cutting it to length and splitting it until it got dark. Maria offered to cook dinner, but Gene said they had to get back home before Lonnie’s mom started worrying about them.

Maria and Hector went inside their house and got settled for the night. Maria was impressed by the wood stove. Once she got a fire going in the firebox, it remained hot enough to cook on for hours, and she soon learned how to move the pots and pans around to keep the heat even. She loved the cast iron griddle for making tortillas, they never stuck, and they came out better than the sheet metal griddle she was using. She remembered how her mom cleaned the cast iron, and never used soap on it. The plates and silverware were beautiful, and the house was warm and light. At night, the florescent fixtures kept the house well-lit. She felt comfortable, safe and secure and relaxed. 2 months later, she realized she skipped 2 periods, and told Hector she was pregnant again. He hugged her, then they prayed that the baby would be OK. Gene and Lonnie came over occasionally, and

Nellie even came over every now and then.

Maria was impressed by her ability to speak fluent Spanish, and asked her tons of questions about how to do things in their new house. Nellie promised to come back in the Spring and show them how to plant a garden. Hector said that he had experience with gardening from working in landscaping companies. Nellie explained growing vegetables was a little different from growing ornamental plants, and there were a couple of tricks she could show him. Later Maria asked Nellie how she learned to speak Spanish so well, and she told her she used to be married to a rich lawyer, and they had a Spanish-speaking maid, and the only way she could talk to her was to learn Spanish. Maria said her accent was perfect, and she could easily understand her. She wished Lonnie could speak it as well as she could, and Nellie explained that they only had the maid for a couple of years when Nellie was a teenager before her husband left her.

Before they packed it in for the winter, Gene and Hector went deer hunting when they learned that Hector and Maria had 2 cases(240 jars) of 1 quart canning jars, and 8 cases(960) of lids and rings. Nellie had at least a case of jars available, and several cases of lids. They shot 4 deer that day, and butchered them, then Nellie showed Maria how to can venison, and make sausage out of the rest. Maria's kitchen was much bigger than Nellie's, so they brought their jars and lids over and did the whole process at Maria's house. That evening, they took 2 cases full of processed deer meat back with them, and 6 feet of venison sausage. Maria put the canned deer meat up in storage, and used the sausage in place of chorizo for breakfast with the scrambled egg powder. Nellie had one of Maria's sausage/egg breakfast burritos one day, and brought over a gallon of Costco salsa she bought but never used. Maria was really grateful, and gave Nellie the recipe for the chorizo and several other Mexican dishes Nellie liked but couldn't make because she couldn't remember the recipe.

The first major snowstorm struck around the middle of November, and Nellie called Maria to make sure they were OK, and she said they were doing fine. Nellie told them that it could snow like this for days, and to expect to get snowed in once or twice. Maria said they were fine, Hector had moved practically a month's worth of wood inside before the snow started, and the well was still working fine. Gene had located the diesel tank, and while they didn't have any

vehicles parked in the garage, the diesel tank was half-full with about 2500 gallons of stabilized diesel in the tank. Gene knew that was more than enough to get them through the winter. Hector said he had some money if they could buy more later, or if the stores opened next spring, then they could go shopping. They cut the conversation short because they didn't want to risk someone eavesdropping and finding out there was someone there with supplies, so Maria said goodbye.

Two months after they were married, Lonnie announced she was pregnant. Gene acted like the proud Daddy, and Nellie said "Oh Good, that means I'll be a grandmother. Of course you know that means I get to spoil them rotten, then give them back to you when they need their diapers changed."

"Speaking of which, I didn't pack any diapers or baby stuff in my kit."

"Not to worry, your Mom the packrat has squirreled over 100 cloth diapers, safety pins, laundry soap, bleach, Desitin, corn starch, and a bunch of clothes. After they're about 3 years old, you're on your own, I didn't get any toddler clothes. Good thing we've got a washer and clothes line to dry stuff, kids are messy, I ought to know!"

"Isn't Maria expecting too, shouldn't we give some of this to them?"

"She isn't due until summer, let's cross that bridge when we get there."

As winter wore on, the snow piled higher and higher. In order to get out, Nellie opened her second-floor door and Gene cleared off the porch roof, making a ramp down to the snow which was even with the bottom of the porch roof. They didn't dare try to walk in it, they'd be buried in a 6-foot drift. Gene knew how to ski, and tried out his cross-country skis from the second-floor window. He made it out OK, but had trouble getting back in until Lonnie threw a rope with a bowline tied in it, and they hauled him up the incline of the porch roof while he herringboned up the slope. They didn't have anywhere else to go, so they abandoned any further attempts to get out except to feed and clean up after the animals. The good news was the animals were pretty self-sufficient once Nellie set them up for the winter with automatic water, water heaters, and food bins that operated on a timer. She only had to get to the goats once a week to clean up their pen and lay down fresh straw bedding in the barn. Whenever Nellie went out to tend the animals, Gene

and Lonnie hauled her back inside using the rope trick. She had to admit having her daughter and her big strong husband made several chores much easier. They spent their days grinding wheat berries to bake sourdough bread, keeping the Air-X wind turbines clear, tending the animals as needed, playing games, reading books, surfing the Internet, listening for news (what little there was) and thinking of baby names.

Finally the snow melted, and Gene mounted the plow blade on Nellie's truck, called Hector and Maria, and the 3 of them paid Hector and Maria a visit. Maria was such a tiny woman that she looked like she had a basketball under her maternity top, and she waddled more than she walked. Still she glowed, and Hector and Gene exchanged congratulations when Hector saw that Lonnie was obviously pregnant too. Gene brought his Sheriff handy talkie, and called the Sheriff to check on the road to Reno. The Sheriff said it would be open in a week or so, and the stores had a limited supply of staples and non-perishables, but they were limiting quantities, and only accepting cash. Nellie stunned the lot of them when she volunteered to donate her stash of cash. She had over \$50 thousand at her house in a safe, and she had another \$50 thousand in gold and silver. Lonnie looked at her mom and thought that settlement she got must have been over a million dollars! Hector objected saying "We can't accept Charity!"

"It's not charity Hector, it's a loan to a neighbor. I can't spend it all, and we might not be able to get it later. Let's go shopping as soon as the road's clear, then I'll pay to have our gas/diesel and propane tanks topped off. The distributor should take a check from my bank if they're open."

Lonnie handed her mom her cellular phone, and amazed everyone when she got a dial tone. She called the fuel distributor, and he said that their trucks would be making deliveries as soon as the road cleared. He agreed to take Nellie's check since he banked at the same bank she did, and Nellie put in an order for enough diesel to fill their tank, and Hector's as well, and enough gasoline to fill their's. Next she called the Propane distributor, who said he had propane, but it was twice what they paid for it last year. Nellie asked him if he'd take a check, and since Nellie was a long-term customer, he agreed. She ordered a full tank of propane, or 2500 pounds, which would hopefully fill her underground storage tanks. The propane dealer said they'd be out there next week to deliver as soon as the snow melted.

With that out of the way, Nellie suggested they make a list of stuff they wanted in town, with the understanding they might not be able to get it later. It took them several hours, and some brain-racking to come up with a list, but they finally did. They'd take Nellie's truck and Lonnie's Jeep and both pull trailers. Since they didn't know if the natives between here and Reno were restless, Gene suggested they go heavily armed and expecting trouble. Nellie's eyes bugged out, then she realized that it was worth the risk, because once the stores sold out, there might not be any new stuff for years, and they'd have to scavenge, which was even more dangerous. They made a list including Wal-mart, Costco, and a gun shop/sporting goods shop for some more ammo and supplies. Gene suggested that if they could rent a Ryder diesel truck in town, he could drive it so they could haul more stuff. Nellie interrupted Gene by telling him she knew of a neighbor that had a big diesel truck with a cube box and a lift gate on it just like a Ryder, and it might have been a Ryder at one time. She didn't know if he'd made it, but he'd either let them borrow it, or he wouldn't be around to care.

Lonnie pointed out the obvious, Maria was 7 or 8 months pregnant, and in no condition to go anywhere. Gene said that the Ryder truck probably had a combination ball/pintle hitch, and could pull their biggest trailer, and Nellie's truck could easily pull Lonnie's trailer. That would leave Nellie and Hector in 1 vehicle, and them in the other. Nellie suggested Maria stay at her house that day since it was more secure than the cabin. Hector looked at Maria who reluctantly agreed. She could barely walk, and would only slow them down.

The next day, they went looking for the Ryder truck at Nellie's friend's house. The place was abandoned, and looked like no one had been there for over 6 months, which told Nellie all she needed to know, her friend Steve was probably dead somewhere. She wasn't romantically involved with him, but she had hoped one day she would, and cried over her loss. Lonnie helped her mom console herself while Hector and Gene worked on getting the truck started. Finally Hector flipped down the driver's side visor, and the keys fell into Gene's lap. He stuck the key in the ignition, and as he feared the battery was dead. They opened the hood, and they lucked out, it was a 12-volt battery. Gene pulled the truck up to the front bumper, and taking Nellie's jumper cables, connected the two batteries while he left the truck running, getting that big diesel started would need a lot of juice! He let it sit for 5 minutes then tried the glow plugs, then a minute later when the light went out, he hit the starter. The starter motor spun, but the engine didn't

want to fire. Hector pointed out a button labeled “Ether” and Gene tried it again, this time pushing the ether button while cranking. This time the motor caught, and eventually settled down to a comfortable idle. Nellie was OK, so Gene and Lonnie drove the big truck back to Nellie’s place while Nellie took Hector home. Gene told Hector to be ready to go in about a week, and he’d call him on the radio.

6 days later, Gene called the Sheriff, who said that Interstate 80 was open with no controls, but there was a storm headed their way that might shut the road for another week to a month that would be there in 3 days. Gene thanked the Sheriff, called Hector, and told him they needed to go NOW, and yelled to Lonnie and Nellie to get ready, they were going right now!

“What’s the rush?”

“Sheriff said the road’s open, but there’s a big storm off the Pacific headed this way that will shut the road down for a week to a month.”

Nellie assessed the situation exactly like Gene did “We’re burning daylight people!” They quickly grabbed their AR-15’s and their gear while Nellie picked up Hector and Maria, who could barely make it into the truck. Hector brought the Mossberg 590 for Maria to use for self-defense, since it had the greatest short-range power, and the biggest intimidation factor. Gene was wearing his vest under his department-issue LBV while Lonnie and Nellie were wearing theirs. Lonnie felt like the Michelin Man wearing all that gear while she was 3 months pregnant, but Gene pointed out she had to protect herself and the baby now. Gene handed Hector his spare vest, and an older surplus LBV he had for his personal AR-15. Gene and Lonnie had the M4/203 combinations, while Nellie and Hector had to make due with the AR-15’s. They all had red dot sights mounted, since if they met any trouble, it was liable to be up-close and personal. Gene had his Para Ord P-14, Lonnie and Nellie each had their Colt Commander, and Hector was borrowing Gene’s spare Kimber so they were all armed with .45’s and .223’s so they only had to carry 2 kinds of ammo. Maria tearfully said goodbye to her husband, and Hector promised he was coming home. Gene left Maria one of his Sheriff Handy Talkies, and if they weren’t back in 2 days to call the Sheriff, and he’d help. Gene didn’t know how much help the Sheriff could be under the circumstances, but that was all he could do for Maria.

They pulled out of the driveway both towing trailers, and drove over the hill to Truckee, then made better time down the hill to Reno. Nellie was glad to see the road was well-plowed, and they were able to drive down at 40mph. She hoped Steve's truck could make it back up the hill fully loaded. Gene must have thought that too, because he went over the vehicle and engine with a fine-tooth comb while he had the time, replaced the oil and coolant, and aired up the tires to their full recommended pressure. When they made it down the hill to Reno, it looked like nothing had happened, except there were very few cars on the roadway. They stopped at Costco first, put on their N-95 masks, and walked to the front door wearing their LBV's and their slung weapons. The door was guarded by 2 armed guards, and when Gene showed his Sheriff's deputy badge, they acted a little less suspicious of them. "Cash only, case limits apply."

"What does Case limits Apply mean?"

"We're limiting you to 1 case per customer of any product so everyone can get something, we're not sure if we're going to get another shipment. Also you'll notice the prices have gone up a little."

"There's 4 of us, does that mean 4 cases?"

"Ok, that sounds reasonable."

Gene realized that the off-duty cops didn't want to argue with another cop, especially one better armed than they were. Seems the Reno PD didn't issue their HSD weapons before the balloon went up, and the officers had their sidearms only, and a shotgun. They took 4 carts and went inside. The aisles were full, and there was almost no one inside. They started down the rows, working on their list. Since they were limiting stock to cases, if they had a full case of something they needed, they bought 4 cases of them. Gene looked at Nellie funny when she loaded a case of 1.75 liter vodka bottles onto her flatbed cart.

"I can get more berries, and we might need some more vodka to make Elderberry Extract."

They went down the food aisles, taking cases of everything on their lists. Finally they finished, and had 8 carts full of stuff. The checker called for help, and they

got them checked in half an hour. Nellie pulled out her Costco card and paid the cashier \$20 thousand in hundreds. She called a manager to verify, and he asked Nellie if she had a checking account.

“Sure I do, I bank with B of A here in Reno. Call John the bank President, he’ll verify a 6-figure balance.”

The manager picked up the phone, dialed B of A, and John must have confirmed Nellie’s bank balance, because he told the cashier to take Nellie’s check, they didn’t want to have to deposit \$20 thousand in cash- it would put them over the courier’s limit. Nellie smiled and wrote them a check for \$20 thousand thinking “Good for me, now I can spend cash elsewhere in case they don’t take checks.” The manager had 2 stock boys help them load the Ryder truck, and Gene tipped them \$20 each. Next they drove to Wal-Mart, and spent over an hour buying everything on their list, filling the rest of the Ryder truck. Then they went to the Grocery store side of Wal-mart and repeated the process, buying supplies and staples that Costco didn’t carry. They filled up the big trailer that Gene had attached to the Ryder, and they went to the next place on their list.

Finally they made it to the Sporting Goods/gun store, and bought cases of ammo for all their weapons, and anything they could buy with a California ID. The owner took Gene aside and said that since he was a Sheriff’s deputy, if he’d sign the 4473, they could buy anything in the store. Gene talked to Nellie, and they started looking at rifles and pistols. Lonnie’s hands were big enough that she could shoot Gene’s P-14, and the dealer had a good used P-14 Limited in stainless for \$400 with 4 high-cap magazines. He had an IWB holster that would fit it, and several extra mags for sale. Nellie didn’t want another gun, but thought that Lonnie should get a bigger gun if she could handle it. The dealer made Gene a package deal, the gun, 8 mags, and the Bladetch IWB plus 8 concealed mag carriers for \$600. Nellie handed Gene \$600, and he filled out the 4473 as the purchaser. When they were finished, Nellie’s truck was full of cases of Ammo, and the trailer was full of tents, stoves, camping food, equipment, sleeping bags, BOB and E&E kit items, fanny packs to make more kits, and daybags for BOB’s.

They drove home, and except for taking forever they made it home without incident. Maria was beside herself when they pulled into the driveway, and despite her very pregnant condition, came out and practically pulled Hector out of

the truck and gave him a very passionate kiss. Maria said that she made dinner, and they could unload the stuff tomorrow. Nellie thought that would be OK since they didn't buy any frozen foods. Maria made roast pork, rice, beans, and fresh flour tortillas with the extra flour Nellie had ground the day before. Nellie said grace, and they all said "Amen". They were so tired that after dinner, they all went to bed. Nellie put Hector and Maria in the spare bedroom that was Gene's before they got married.

The next morning, they awoke to the smell of bacon and eggs, with sourdough toast and fresh coffee. After breakfast they unloaded the trucks, then Nellie drove Hector and Maria back to their place while Gene and Lonnie followed in her Jeep to help unload and put everything up. They went back home right before dinner, and the next morning, the fuel distributor showed up, filled their gas and diesel tanks with stabilized fuel, then filled Hector and Maria's tank full of stabilized diesel. Later that afternoon, the propane dealer showed up, and basically emptied his tank into Nellie's underground tank. The next day, it started snowing again, and kept it up for 3 days. By the end of the 3rd day, they had 10 feet of snow on the ground.

Chapter 9

They didn't get out of their houses much the rest of the winter, except when Hector called on the radio, and said Maria was about to deliver. They took Nellie's truck with the snowplow over and Nellie acted as midwife while Hector and Gene made themselves scarce, and Lonnie helped doing stuff. 8 hours later, Maria gave birth to a boy that they decided to name Manuel. As soon as Maria and her son were cleaned up, Lonnie got Hector and brought him in to hold his son, then he gently placed him on his wife's breast, and he started to nurse. They covered Maria and Manuel and went into the other room. They congratulated Hector, and Nellie told him what he had to do for the next 48 hours. Check both their temperatures, keep Maria well hydrated and warm, but not hot, and let them sleep as much as they wanted. He needed to check Manuel's diaper every couple of hours, and since they weren't using disposables, he'd need to wash the poop out in the toilet, and throw the wet diaper in a diaper pail to wash later. Maria could show him later how much soap and bleach to use. Hector gave Lonnie and Nellie a hug and thanked them for taking care of his wife, shook Gene's hand, and they went back to Nellie's place. After they got home Lonnie nervously asked her mom if delivery hurt as much as it looked.

"Sorry dear, without modern medicine, delivery is painful, but you quickly forget the pain when you hold your new baby in your arms. That makes it all worth it." No matter what her mom said Lonnie was not looking forward to childbirth, she thought Maria was going to scream her lungs out toward the end right before she crowned. A month later, when the snow melted, Lonnie and Gene decided to visit Maria and Hector. By now Lonnie was very pregnant and could barely get in the truck, but she wanted to see Maria and find out how she was doing. They had some quality "Girl time" and Lonnie asked Maria point blank "How Bad did it hurt?"

"Not as bad as I was afraid it would. Don't think it was a picnic, but once I saw little Manuel's face and felt him suckling on my breast, I knew it was worth it." Lonnie looked at Maria, hoping she had just translated those last phrases correctly. Maria's smile, and Manuel nursing on her right breast brought it all home to her. This was what it was all about, bringing another life into the world. She thanked Maria, said they had to get back home, and Gene was wondering why they drove all the way over there only to stay for 1 hour.

“I had to see Maria. Seeing her screaming in pain during childbirth freaked me out. When I talked to her she put it all in perspective. Do yourself a favor, when I’m in labor, don’t ask to share the experience, or I might grab something and yank HARD!”

Gene’s face said it all - OUCH!!! “I promise I won’t say anything that stupid. Do you want me in the delivery room?”

“If you can handle me turning into something from the Exorcist, I’d like to have you there.”

“I doubt your head will turn ALL the way around. I’ve done 3 emergency deliveries since I joined the department, and so far no one’s head has spun all the way around. Several swore like sailors, and one woman screamed at her husband right in front of me saying “This is all your fault!” I felt bad for her husband, she was there when the baby was conceived too, and could have said no.”

“That’s just it, some women count on the miracle of modern medicine to take away the pain, and when they have to deliver without it, they freak out. I was hoping to deliver in a hospital, but after what we heard on the radio, there might not be hospitals available for a long time. 3/4 of the doctors and nurses were dead according to the news report, and some were in hiding and refused to report for work. I think they were the smart ones. It was like your department, staying at work might have just cost you your life with little to gain. This virus is deadly, highly transmissible, and nothing but Elderberry Extract and chicken soup have had any effect. I heard Roche filed for bankruptcy, and several of their buildings around the world have been firebombed and the management assassinated, executed, lynched, or killed by rampaging mobs. Tamiflu turned out to be a total bust, and at \$500 a series, a very expensive bust.”

“Lonnie, no one knew when they were touting Tamiflu that H5N1 would mutate so fast, and become 100% resistant to Tamiflu and all other pharmaceutical antivirals. It really wasn’t Roche’s fault.”

“I’m just really glad my Mom was into herbal medicine and had a bunch of Elderberry Extract in her medicine pantry. You should see it, she’s got every herbal remedy known to Man in her pantry, and several excellent books on Herbal

Medicine. I think that Herbalists are going to be the “doctors” of the future.”

“Why’s that?”

“This pandemic killed all the other doctors and nurses, and wrecked the people’s confidence in Modern Medicine. Herbal Medicine is the only alternative left.”

“Still a lot of modern medicine works, like anesthesia, various drugs, etc.”

“Yeah, once the pharmaceutical companies rebuild, we’ll have access to drugs, but that will take a while.”

6 months later, Lonnie woke up with the sheets soaked and woke up Gene “I think my water just broke!” He helped his wife get out of bed, called Nellie, who came running with fresh sheets and a large piece of visqueen. They quickly remade the bed, and right when they finished, Lonnie’s labor started. Nellie kicked Gene out of the room for now, and she’d let him know when she needed him. He turned on the FRS/GMRS only to hear Hector’s panicked voice saying something about “Mucho Banditos” and they were en-route to their place in Lonnie’s Jeep. Lonnie was too pregnant to drive, so Nellie suggested they keep Lonnie’s jeep at their place for emergencies. Gene had fun showing Hector how to drive the stick shift, but once he got it figured out, Gene could have sworn Hector was a NASCAR driver, he only knew 1 speed “Muy Rapido!” Gene convinced him that the throttle did have more than two positions, and Hector slowed down a little.

This time, Hector put the foot to the floor, and wasn’t stopping for anything! 2 minutes later, they slid into Nellie’s driveway, and broke several speed records getting themselves, Manuel and all their gear out of the Jeep and into the house. Out of breath, Hector finally was able to tell Gene the rest of the story. A small group of banditos approached the house, and Maria made it inside before any shots were fired. Manny was outside working on the garden when he heard the gunshots and managed to make it to a bunker with his AR-15. When he realized they weren’t there to collect for the March of Dimes, he put the crosshairs of his scope on the forehead of the leader of the group just like Gene had told him, and saying a quick prayer, squeezed the trigger. The round struck right where it was supposed to right above the nose, and blew the dirtbag’s brains over the rest of the gang. He quickly shot the rest of them, then went to get Maria.

When they checked, one was still living, and Maria did something he never saw her do before. The survivor was obviously Mexican, and might have said something to Maria before she ran for the house. She took out a small skinner and slit his pants open close to his crotch, and holding the knife against his manhood, started asking him questions. Realizing that one wrong answer would mean that he'd spend the last minutes of his life signing Soprano if he lied or tried to not answer her questions, he spilled his guts. They were a scouting force for a much larger bunch of looters and banditos. He once had a family, but they died in the plague, and decided that he needed to survive, and a group was safer, so when the Lobos offered him a spot in their gang, he accepted. Soon the Lobos were overtaken by a much larger Biker/convict group, and the survivors were offered the choice of joining up or dying on the spot. He was pretty sure the "Cabezas" as they called the Skinheads would have heard the gunshots from their gunfight and come running, he was pretty sure they'd be there in a matter of minutes.

He started to taunt Maria by telling her what the "Cabezas" would do to her when they caught her, when Maria screamed and jerked the knife to the left, amputating the bandito's genitals, then left him bleeding and screaming where he lay. They ran back into the house, packed everything they could into the Jeep in 5 minutes including their rifles, food, and clothing, and Hector drove "Muy Rapido" to Nellie's place, while trying to raise him on the radio. Finally "Gracias a Dios" he answered, and Hector tried to tell him what happened over the roar of the Jeep's V-8. By the time Hector got the whole story out, Gene realized why Mexicans spoke so fast, they didn't breathe while they were talking! Realizing they were about to be overwhelmed by a superior force, he made a command decision, told Maria to take care of Lonnie, who was in the early stages of labor, and went in to get Nellie and tell her to man the central bunker with his suppressed and scoped M-1a. He knew she was capable of hitting man-sized targets at 600 yards, which far out-ranged any other weapons they had access to. He and Hector would take the M4/M203 combinations with half of the 40mm grenades each, and set up in the flanking bunkers protecting the sides of the house. There was no "Back of the house, since the backside of the house backed into a hill that was impassible except for deer and sure-footed goats.

Right after they got set up, Gene heard noise coming up the fire road. The gang was lead by several freaky-looking bikers with swastikas or pentagrams tattooed on their bald foreheads, and dozens of follow-on forces riding in open-top Jeeps.

While Nellie set up, a million thoughts were running through her mind. She'd been a Pacifist all her life and now she was being forced to take a life, and not just one, but almost 100 by the looks of the cloud of vehicles headed up her road. She started praying, then realized it was up to her to defend Lonnie and her grandchild. Lonnie was in the house giving birth to the next generation, and these scumbags that were attacking them didn't care, they wanted what they had, and would then rape and kill the women when they were finished with them. She remembered a conversation she'd had with Lonnie. She said that if they were about to be captured, she would rather die by her own hand and to save the last round for herself. Nellie was dead-set against suicide on Theological grounds, but kept her peace. When the scumbags finally got within range, Nellie felt a primordial rage building in her, and she recognized it as being the same feeling a Mother Bear gets when her cubs are threatened.

She sighted in the first dirtbag with the pentagram on his forehead, and decided to use it for an aiming point. Seconds later, she could see through the scope when his head exploded out the back, and he fell off his bike right into the path of the jeep behind him, which rolled over his body and crushed it beneath it's wheels. Nellie snapped out of it, and targeted the next MZB in line who had the hated swastika tattooed on his forehead. Seconds later, her next round sent him to an early appointment with his boss. Once she found the range, she kept firing until the magazine was dry, and quickly reloaded. She locked the second magazine into the magazine well, and kept up where she left off. Moments later, she heard what sounded like a swarm of bees buzzing around her, and she realized in the back of her mind that she was under fire, but she kept shooting to protect Lonnie and the baby. Suddenly there was a sharp pain in her neck, then blackness.

Gene saw that Nellie was the first to fire at about 600 yards, and hit the bikers, killing them. Suddenly she was the center of attention, with full auto AK's, M16's, and a few belt-fed weapons opening up on her. Gene swore when he realized they were still out of range of his grenade launcher. They kept coming, and Nellie kept killing them until they got within 400 yards, and all firing from the central bunker stopped.

Fearing the worst, Gene and Hector took advantage of the lull in the fighting to have a quick electronic pow-wow, and divided the scumbags in front of them so they could all be eliminated in their first volley. Thinking Nellie was dead, Gene

furiously fired dozens of grenades as fast as he could into the mass of dead and dying dirtbags, and burning vehicles. The smell of burning flesh was everywhere, but Gene was so furious he didn't notice it. Finally they got out of their bunkers, and went to check on Nellie. Her body was intact, but she was practically decapitated by what Gene thought was an unlucky million-to-one shot that glanced off the steel plate protecting the gun port, flattened out, and sliced into Nellie's neck like a scalpel, severing her windpipe and both arteries. As she laid there in a pool of blood, Gene hoped there were some survivors among the dirtbags that he could kneecap or cause to die in extreme pain. He thought Maria had the right idea, but he wasn't going to risk catching any sort of diseases from these dirtbags, who were probably covered with fleas, lice and other vermin.

Gene called Maria, and told her the fighting was over. She said that Gene needed to clean up and get back in the house, Lonnie was asking for him. He asked Hector if he could keep an eye out front from the bunker, he needed to be with his wife, who was in labor. Hector nodded, and Gene took off like a scared rabbit. Once he was inside the door, he stripped off his LBV, and all his weapons, changed his clothes and took a quick shower so Lonnie wouldn't see or smell Nellie's blood on him. Right as he walked into the delivery room, Lonnie screamed and arched her back. He was by her side in 4 strides, holding her hand. "Lonnie dear, I'm here now." He stayed by her side for the rest of the afternoon and into the evening, as Lonnie's labor pains intensified and got closer together. Finally at 6 o'clock, she delivered a son. Maria was surprised when the next thing down Lonnie's birth canal wasn't the placenta, but another baby's head "Madre De Dios - Twins!" Gene heard the last part, and was glad he was sitting down. "Lonnie, you're having twins, it will be a while longer, but you can do it!" By 8 o'clock, she'd delivered her second child, a girl. Maria was relieved when the placenta came next. She bagged it for disposal while Gene cleaned his daughter and Lonnie up. Finally Lonnie asked "Where's Mom?"

"Sorry Lonnie, she didn't make it - she died in the attack."

"What, How?"

"Lonnie, she never knew what hit her, it was a million-to-one shot that glanced off the steel plate protecting the gun port, and severed both her arteries and her windpipe."

Lonnie wept for her mom, then felt the infant at her breast, and knew she had to be strong for her babies. Gene placed her daughter on her other breast, and soon they were both nursing.

“Lonnie, what do you want to call them?”

“How about Nellie in honor of my Mom, and Jake.”

“Works for me. You rest for a while, and we’ll bury your Mom tomorrow when you’re feeling better.” Gene gave Lonnie as big of a hug as he could under the circumstances, and turned to leave. Manny met him outside and told him “I dumped the dirtbags’ bodies in a big pit when I realized they were all dead, removed all the usable equipment and ammo, and buried the rest with them. I rolled Nellie up in a tarp and laid her next to the house in the shade.”

“Lonnie wants to be there tomorrow to bury her mom. Is there any way we can keep Nellie’s body from decomposing too much before then?”

“Take all the ice cubes out of the freezers, put them in trash bags and pack them around the body. It’s the best we can do. Just make sure you remove the bags before you let Lonnie see the body.”

They spent the rest of the afternoon scrounging ice and packing Nellie in ice. Maria stayed with Lonnie, talking to her about her experiences raising Manny. Even though she was almost 10 years younger than Lonnie, she was grateful to have an experienced mother with her. She thought of her Mom, and realized just how much she was going to miss her. She was just glad it wasn’t Gene. The next morning after breakfast, they gathered to bury Nellie. Gene had dug a deep hole near one of Nellie’s favorite trees while Hector carved a cross. Lonnie asked them to give her a few minutes alone with her mom, so they agreed. She walked up to the body wrapped in the blue tarp, and knew better than to unwrap it. She could see her mom’s face, and that was all she needed to know, her Mom really was dead. She knelt down and wept uncontrollably for about 15 minutes. Finally she felt Gene’s hand on her shoulder. “She died saving us all. I brought her Bible with me, I marked a several verses you might want to read over the grave.”

He handed her Nellie’s King James Bible with several pages marked, and a post-it

note listing the verses. She read them to herself first. The first one read “John 15:13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” Once her tears dried, she read the next one, her favorite, Psalm 23 “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.” When she finished, Gene, Hector and Maria were standing there. They each quickly picked up a corner of the tarp and carried Nellie’s body the short distance to the grave, set it in the grave as gently as possible, then the 4 of the knelt while Lonnie read from the Bible. Hector recognized the passages, and Maria’s understanding of English was improving enough to catch most of the words. Finally when they were finished, Hector and Maria said the Lord’s Prayer in Spanish, while Lonnie and Gene followed along in English. Even though he wasn’t a priest, Hector made the sign of the cross over the grave and blessed it, then they filled in the grave. Lonnie shoveled a couple of shovelfuls, and was obviously too tired to do more, so Gene took over while Maria helped her back into the house to feed her babies. Once the grave was filled in, Hector drove the cross into the ground at the head with the back of the shovel, made the sign of the cross again, whispered “Vaya con Dios mi Hermana.” then turned and followed Gene back into the house.

The next day, Gene called up the Sheriff, told him what happened, and told him about Nellie’s death.

“Gene, I’ve got a copy of Nellie’s will here, let me get it.” 5 minutes later he was back on the phone. “Nellie’s money was all in a trust fund that was set up that when she died, the entire fund was to be given to Lonnie. Judging by the last time I talked to Nellie, the trust was worth around \$1.5 Million, and Nellie was living on the interest. The house and all the properties were part of the trust as well, so there is no probate required. I’ll fill out Nellie’s death certificate, and I need you to drive over here, and pick it up and some other stuff.”

“How long is it going to take?”

“I’ll have it ready by the time you meet me at the Sheriff’s Office.”

“Thanks Larry, see you then.”

Gene walked into the living room where Lonnie was nursing Jake and Nellie, and Maria was nursing Manny. Hector had made himself scarce, so he talked to Lonnie. “I talked to Larry the Sheriff, and told him Nellie died. He had a copy of the will, and told me some interesting news. Your mom’s Trust Fund was worth over \$1.5 Million, and the will stipulated the trust be dissolved on her death, and the proceeds given to you, including the house and all her assets. Larry said there’s nothing to probate since the trust took care of it. He wanted me to come over and pick up her death certificate and some other stuff. I’ll be back in an hour or two.”

Lonnie stood with both babies in her arms, and maneuvered to kiss Gene, and made him promise to be careful.

“Don’t worry, Lonnie, I’m always careful. I just wish I could have done something to keep your mom from dying.”

“I got a look at her body, and even a surgeon couldn’t have saved her. Her neck was ripped wide open like someone had taken a razor sharp knife to it. I doubt if she even felt it. She’s in Heaven now with Jesus. Please be careful and hurry back!”

Gene gave her another kiss, and grabbed his LBV, Kevlar Vest, and his M4/M203 as he went out the door. He felt funny driving Nellie’s truck, but realized it was now their truck. He drove as rapidly as he could while still keeping an eye out for ambushes or other attacks, and made it to the Sheriff’s office an hour later. “Gene, sorry about Nellie, we’ll all miss her around here. I wish I would have given this to you sooner, Nellie might still be alive.”

“Given us WHAT Sheriff?”

Larry had Gene back up to the loading dock, and using a pallet jack and loading ramps, they start loading crate after crate of stuff into the truck. Gene recognized some of the markings on the crates from his time in Air Force Security, but some

he didn't recognize. Gene explained that HSD delivered a lot more than the AR-15's and grenade launchers the newspapers knew about. This was surplus front-line military gear that they were to store and pre-position if ever needed by "peacekeeping" forces. Gene knew that euphemism meant either UN, ATF, or FEMA JBT's with as many NG troops as they could buffalo with a bunch of Federal paperwork. By the size of the stash, he knew that whoever sent this stuff to a small sheriff's department in the middle of nowhere must have sent boxcars full of stuff to the LAPD and other "big city" departments for storage! That idea scared him to the core. When they started opening the cases, Gene was glad he'd used the bathroom before he left, or he might have soiled his pants.

"Holy crap Larry, that's a crate full of LAW rockets, another full of MP-5SD's and magazines, over 10 cases of subsonic 9mm ammo, a crate full of Claymores and another full of bouncing betties and M14 anti-personnel mines. This crate here is full of MP riot gear including the latest bullet-proof vests designed to stop 30-caliber rifle fire. There's a crate full of M4/M203 combos, 2 crates full of 40mm HE and HEDP grenades. The only thing they didn't give you was some AT-4 anti-tank missiles!"

"I knew I forgot something, there's a few more crates in the armory I think you can use with your military background." They walked back into the armory, and between the two of them, loaded 4 more crates onto pallet jacks and pulled them out to the truck. 1 contained AT-4 anti-tank missiles and launchers, 1 contained a Stinger Launcher and 4 missiles, 1 contained a Barrett's Light 50 and 5 cases of BMG-50 Match ammo, and the last contained 6 pairs of NVG's, 30 spare batteries, and 2 Night Vision scopes. The final box contained all the FM's for everything.

"Gene, Sally and I always thought of you as a son. As soon as TSHTF, we're taking off to a secure location and never coming back. I already gave the other trustworthy deputies their share of the gear, but you got the lion's share since I want to make sure you and Lonnie survive what's coming. I told you I don't like the way the country is going, and I wanted to give the rest of the stuff in the armory to a few deputies I could trust. This stuff was supposed to be pre-positioned for "peacekeeping forces" use in the event of a National Emergency. You and I know that means FEMA and ATF JBT's, and any NG troops they can buffalo with a bunch of Federal paperwork. If I know GW, he's been signing so many Executive Orders that he's had a major writer's cramp for weeks. He can't

serve a third term, and I'm afraid he really wants to be "President for Life" and the power has gotten to his head. You notice the feds haven't done bupkiss to stop this plague except lock down the sheeple in the big cities, and let them die off."

"Why wasn't Reno locked down?"

"My best guess is they're saving Nevada, Arizona, Idaho and Utah for later. They wanted to pacify the bulk of the Sheeple on both coasts first, then let them die off and tackle the Mountain States next. We'll get it when they're finished with Reno. I'd take all of Nellie's money you can get hold of, and buy everything you can store for 10 years worth of stuff, then stay up here until the coast is clear. Another thing I'd highly suggest is having that Mexican couple move in with you - you're too far apart for mutual support if either of you get attacked. The County has a 60x120 Quonset hut sitting in storage taking up space that I can get the County to sell you cheap. I know the owners of the propane and fuel distributors personally, and I'll make them an offer they can't refuse to sell you another 5K gallons of treated diesel and propane, and I'm sure the County lot has a used Diesel truck they'd be willing to sell to you surplus."

"Thanks Larry, you don't know what that means to me - I'll never forget this!"

"Just make sure and outlive the b@stards, this is going to get real ugly really fast, maybe even a Civil War before it's over."

Gene shook Larry's hand, got back in his truck, and drove back to the house to give Nellie the good news. She took it amazingly well considering he was telling her that they were maybe 6 months to a year from a major societal collapse and a possible Civil War. Hector and Maria were still there, and agreed to move in with them while they helped build their "house" next to theirs. It would be 6 months of hard work to get the Quonset hut built, the basement and fuel storage dug, the concrete slabs and footings poured, reinforced concrete poured over the Quonset hut and covered with 6 feet of earth, and all the furniture moved in before next winter. The four of them sat down and made plans. They didn't want anyone in Reno knowing they were building another shelter, or buying lots of supplies to prevent them from turning them in to the Feds when they started turning up the heat. They decided that Gene and Lonnie would drive the big cube van with a large trailer back and forth to Reno with all the building supplies they would need,

rent any equipment they would need. Hopefully Larry could locate some local people they could trust to help.

Chapter 10

The next day, Lonnie's cell phone rang. Gene didn't remember leaving it on. He answered, and Larry said that he arranged everything, including his brother that owned a small contracting company that hired mostly illegals who would love the work, and would be moved on before the stuff started happening. He talked to the fuel and propane distributors, who agreed to install their largest tanks, bury them deep, and keep them full for as long as possible. Gene said the down-side was they wanted a quarter-million cash in advance between the two of them to install their biggest tanks, fill them full, then the balance would be a credit against future refills on a fuel-available basis, but they'd have priority right below the County for any available diesel, gas or propane. Gene talked to Lonnie, who told him "Do whatever you think is best dear, it's only money." Gene knew that Lonnie might be suffering from Postpartum depression. "Lonnie, this is your money, even though we're married. I think you should be involved in any decisions to spend it. He walked over to his wife, and whispered in her ear "I love you dear, and you'll need to watch yourself for the next couple of days in case you start to develop Postpartum depression. It's a normal after-effect of childbirth particularly the lack of pregnancy hormones in your bloodstream. Couple that with the death of your mother, and you really need to watch yourself. Make sure you get enough to eat and drink, and are sleeping OK. If you need to talk to me about anything, feel free to ask, or if it's Girl stuff, Maria's English is getting better."

"Gene, a quarter-million for 2 5,000 gallon tanks buried up here, plus full of fuel is a steal. I'd take Larry up in a heartbeat."

"Good, because he also lined up his Brother's building company to erect the Quonset hut, line it with reinforced concrete and bury it. He hires mostly illegals, who won't be around in 6 months anyways, so it should be safe. That way, all the supplies can get run through the construction company, and they won't ask any inconvenient questions."

"Sounds like a plan Gene - Larry's still on the phone!"

"Yikes, I forgot. Larry you there?"

"Yeah and I heard most of the conversation. Running the supplies through Dale's

business is a brilliant idea. I'll suggest he keeps the markup down to 10% plus his transportation costs."

"We've got a huge cube van and diesel to burn if he needs it for trips to Reno for supplies."

"You might call John at the bank, and have him arrange things with Costco for you to buy pallets of supplies and drive back and forth with the truck so no one in Reno knows exactly where you're at."

"Thanks Larry, I'll do just that - Anything else?"

"Just stick close to home when you're not doing anything - I've heard rumors of more armed gangs roaming the area."

"Ok Larry, thanks."

"Lonnie, that was Larry, he suggested we contact John at the B of A, and have him arrange things with Costco so we can order pallet loads of supplies, and drive back and forth with the cube van."

"Sounds like a plan Gene, could you hand me the cell phone?"

Lonnie located John's personal number in the phone's address book, and called him.

"John, this is Lonnie. I'm sorry she died the other day, we were attacked by a bunch of dirtbags and she died in the attack. Larry the Sheriff gave Gene a death certificate for her, and a copy of her will. You want me to come down and sign a couple of forms, and make sure I bring the will and death certificate? Ok, see you first thing tomorrow."

Lonnie told Gene what John said, and went looking in the pantry for something that she knew her mom the "packrat" probably had, even though she would never need it - sure enough she found a manual breast pump, bags, nipples, and the container, along with the instructions. She carried the whole box into the living room, and Maria was surprised that the instructions came in English and Spanish.

Lonnie handed her the Spanish pages, and they sat down to read the document while they nursed. Between the two infants, Lonnie was drinking almost 2 gallons of water a day, and watching what she ate like a hawk, making sure she got enough protein, carbohydrates, and vitamins . She had enough body fat that she didn't have to worry about the fat content of her milk.

When Jake and Nellie finished, she attached the breast pump connector to her nipple, and with some fear, started pumping. It didn't hurt as much as when Jake bit her, but it wasn't the most pleasant experience either. Eventually she filled up a 6oz bag, and put it in the refrigerator like the instructions said. When she finished, she massaged her nipple to relieve the swelling, and eventually she relaxed, only to have to repeat the process with her other breast. She filled another bag, and added it to the collection, then went to the sink and tanked up on as much water as she could drink. She told Maria she had to go to the bank in Reno tomorrow, and might be gone a while. Maria said she could babysit, and was grateful Lonnie decided to store some extra breast milk, because she was producing just enough for Manny.

Sometimes Lonnie felt like a cow with her big breasts, then realized that Maria's were maybe 1/3 the size of hers, and that God prepared her body in advance to be able to nurse twins. Gene didn't seem to mind either. Every time Lonnie nursed Jake and Nellie, she pumped the extra and stored it in the refrigerator. By the next morning, she had 6 6oz bags of breast milk, more than enough to feed her babies for the day. Right before they left, she nursed again, and filled up 2 more bags with the excess. Maria knew how to prepare the bags to feed Jake and Nellie, and Hector would be there to protect everyone, so she felt reasonably secure leaving her babies there. Taking them with them was much more dangerous according to Gene, and this way she'd have her hands free to shoot. She'd upgraded her E&E kit to include the P-14 and 6 spare 14-round magazines full of "flying ashcan" defensive ammo, and stuck the Colt Commander back in the IWB holster with 2 spare mags so if someone asked her to take off the E&E kit, like she was sure the bank would require, she'd still be armed. They both took the M4/M203 combos and a bandoleer full of HEDP and HE 40mm grenades.

After filling the gas tank, they climbed into Lonnie's Jeep since it was quicker and more maneuverable than Nellie's truck, and headed to Reno. Lonnie felt more comfortable this time in her kevlar vest, then she realized this time she wasn't

carrying twins. All the way to the bank, she prayed they wouldn't get ambushed. They were stopped at the Nevada border by 2 NHP cruisers blocking the road with the troopers carrying shotguns and an M-1a rifle. Gene showed them his badge and ID, and Lonnie showed them hers' and told them they had business in Reno with the B of A. The trooper pressed the PTT on his lapel mike and replied to the dispatcher, who had obviously ran them and the Jeep for wants and warrants. When they came back clean, and when he verified that Gene was indeed a Sierra County Deputy, the supervising deputy took a blue star sticker out of his cruiser, wrote something on it and placed it in the upper left corner of their windshield, then told them to have a nice day. When they got to Reno, Gene checked the sticker, and realized it was a 5-pointed star, and the supervisor had written Gene's badge number on it. Gene suggested that he drive the lead vehicle in any convoys they take to Reno from here on out. It seemed the NHP had just ID'd his vehicle as a visiting LEO vehicle, which should allow them through the roadblocks, at least for now.

Gene pulled into the bank parking lot, which was guarded by an off-duty Reno PD officer with a shotgun, who saw the LEO sticker, and visibly relaxed. Gene rolled down the drivers side window, and the Reno PD officer told them to park as close to the door as possible, and leave their guns in the vehicle. Gene and Lonnie were both carrying concealed, and left their concealed weapons where they were, but set the M4's and their E&E kits on the floorboards as requested, then went in. Lonnie asked for John when they came up to the receptionist desk, and John walked around the counter to greet Lonnie. "Sorry about Nellie, I haven't seen you for years."

"John, this is my husband Gene, we were just married during the pandemic. I need to get our marriage registered, and get Gene on my signature card for the account. Here's Nellie's death certificate and a notarized copy of her will."

"I've already got a copy, she filed the original in her safe deposit box, and left instructions that when you presented me a copy of her death certificate you be given the key to the safe deposit, and that the entire amount of the trust fund be transferred to your bank account. You can either leave it in a passbook, or we would be more than willing to set up a new trust for you."

"Thanks John, maybe later. Right now if you could just do as the trust provides

and transfer the funds into my checking account, I'd appreciate it. Sheriff Larry Rogers of Sierra County suggested you contact Costco about us buying pallet-sized quantities of food and supplies."

"Why would you want to do that?"

Gene spoke up "John, Larry is privy to HSD level information I'm not a liberty to discuss, lets' just say that there is a very good reason for her to want to stock up on as much food and supplies as we can store as quickly as possible. It might be nothing, then again it might mean the end of Civilization, or at least the US as we know it."

John's eyes got big, he wrote a note and passed it to his head teller, and 30 seconds later, she handed him a portable phone and the direct personal number of the Costco District Manager in Reno.

"Jim, John at B of A. Need a favor. I've got a major customer with a 6-figure account that needs to order truck loads of supplies from you. They have a 40-foot cube van, and want to place large orders, but not disturb your customers. Yes, they are members. One minute."

"Could you hand me your Costco Card?"

Lonnie handed John her card, and he read off the number.

"Thanks Jim, her name is Lonnie Smith. Her maiden name was Lonnie Simpson. Yes, she's the daughter of Nellie, unfortunately she recently died. Ok, I'll have them e-mail a list of products they want. OK, you send one to me right now with what you have. You have my address? Great, I'll wait for it - thanks."

5 minutes later, John's e-mail said "You've got Mail." and he opened an e-mail from Jim at Costco with what they had and a confidential price list. Lonnie asked John "What's my account balance after the deposit from the trust?"

John closed 1 window, and opened another, typed her account number and read off a figure. Lonnie almost fainted. Her mom's trust fund was worth almost \$2 Million including accrued interest. She'd been living on the interest for years, and

re-depositing the interest disbursements she didn't need, to accelerate her earnings. Lonnie looked at the list, borrowed John's calculator, and started adding. 10 minutes later, she had an order for \$500 thousand worth of food and supplies, which was less than 1/4 of Costco's current stock. John e-mailed the order to Jim, who called back as soon as he got the e-mail.

"John, that's several 18-wheelers full of stuff, are they sure?"

John had put Jim on speaker phone, and both Gene and Lonnie nodded.

"They're sure Jim. I can't divulge why, but take my word for it, they think they've got a good reason, and I'm inclined to believe them.

"Ok, It will take me a couple of days to put this together. For this kind of quantity, I could arrange delivery via a local shipping company."

Lonnie nodded, she wasn't looking forward to making dozens of trips to Reno, and the shipping company was a small risk compared to getting ambushed on a dozen trips to Reno. John spoke up. "Ok, you can arrange for shipping, but it will be FOB their house since there's a lot of security risks right now."

"I'm sure I can find a company that can handle it - it will probably cost twice as much as usual, but considering what's going on, it would be well worth it."

"Ok, Jim, arrange everything on your end, and I'll arrange payment via a wire transfer. Call me when you're ready to ship, and I'll give the shipper the delivery address."

"Ok John, nice doing business with you."

"I realized you guys would like to keep this information as confidential as possible, so only the driver and the shipping company will know the delivery address. It should take them 2-3 tractor-trailer loads to get it to you. If they've got a double that could make it over the pass, they just might ship it in a double. If there's anything else you need, here's my card. If you want to sign a limited power of attorney, I can order anything else you need in Reno, and have the same shipping company deliver it for let's say a 20% markup plus delivery."

“We’re talking about maybe a half-mil plus worth of stuff here, 20% is a little steep, how about 10%?”

“My time’s valuable, plus I save you the risks of having to come to town. I’ll do it for no less than delivery costs plus 15%.”

“15% of the cost of the goods, not including shipping?”

“Ok, deal!”

John pulled a limited power of attorney form out of his desk, typed in Lonnie and Gene’s names, and the details, then had them sign it. He told them if they made it to the County Clerk’s office by 1:00 they could register their marriage today. They thanked him and walked out to the jeep, being careful of their surroundings. They got into the Jeep, and just made it to the Clerk’s desk by 1:00. They told him the story of their mother-in-law marrying them, and they already had twins. The clerk took their fee, had them fill out a marriage license, and then stamped it, and gave them a copy. They drove back to the bank to put the license in the Safe Deposit box. John made a copy for them, and put it in a manilla envelope, then they went to check the safe deposit box. Expecting a small box, they were stunned when John removed one of the biggest boxes in their safe, put it on a dolly and wheeled it into a privacy room. Once they were alone, Gene asked Lonnie “do you want to be alone, there might be some private stuff in there.”

“It’s ok Gene, I need you close right now.”

They opened the box together once they got it on the desk, and were glad they were sitting down. It was half-full of 1oz Silver and Gold coins, and a bunch of paperwork. After a long discussion, they realized the Gold and Silver would be just as secure in their extra gun safe at home as it was there, and way more accessible if TSHTF. Gene stuck his head out, had a brief discussion with John, and they were met by an armed bank guard who would keep an eye on them while they transferred the boxes to the bed of Lonnie’s jeep. She put the personal papers, including their original marriage license into a much smaller safe deposit box, asked John to change their deposit contract to reflect the smaller box, and he had them both sign a new signature card for the joint box. They rolled the boxes out of the bank on a dolly, and Lonnie lowered the tailgate then they both muscled

the heavy boxes into the bed of the jeep and covered them with a tarp. Lonnie locked the tailgate, and quickly got into the passenger seat after putting her Kevlar vest and LBV back on, then securely fastened her seat belts, and picked up the M4's off the floorboard, held 1 in her left hand for Gene, and the other between her knees, with the chamber loaded and the safety on. They made it to the California border, and were surprised there weren't any CHP officers manning their checkpoint. Gene guessed that they were stopping traffic right outside Sacto instead. 2 hours later, they drove into the driveway, where Hector was waiting for them. Lonnie let Gene and Hector unload the jeep while she went in to check on her babies, and nurse them, her breasts were killing her. When she was finished, she sighed audibly and buttoned back up. Right then Gene walked in.

"I've got an idea but you're probably think I'm nuts. The only thing Larry didn't give us was some heavy machine guns like the Ma Deuce. We've got almost \$2 Million in the bank, plus all that gold and silver. It might be worth a couple hundred thousand or more to get two with 6 spare barrels and 10,000 rounds of combat mix."

"Ok, I really don't want to know about what you're up to since it's probably very illegal, but go ahead."

Gene borrowed Lonnie's cell phone, called Larry, and met him half a hour later.

"Ok, what's the big secret?"

"I don't know how or if you can, but we need a couple of Ma Deuces to make sure that we survive any future attacks. I figure 2 Ma Deuces, 6 spare barrels, and 10,000 rounds of combat mix."

"Anything else?"

"Whatever you can get for a quarter mill."

"I think I can handle it, but they'll want gold."

"I think I can handle that."

“Call me in two weeks.”

“Ok, nice talking to you.”

Chapter 11

Gene hadn't left the parking lot when Larry took out his cell phone, dialed a number from memory and said to the answering machine "PsychoKitty this is Hair ball, meet me at the usual place at 1800, out." 2 hours later, Larry was waiting in his pickup truck near a notorious biker bar for his contact PsychoKitty. Larry had to laugh at his contact's codename - it fit. He thought Hair Ball was pretty cruel, but you didn't argue with PsychoKitty and live. Right at 1800, he heard the roar of an unmuffled Harley coming up the alleyway. He got out of his truck and kept his hands in plain sight like PsychoKitty had told him the first time they made contact. Seconds later, Larry was blinded by the headlight of the chopper, and then the bike came to a stop. He remembered seeing the bike in daylight last time in a rare daylight meeting. It was a midnight black and chrome hard tail chopper with an S&S 140 cubic inch V-twin, jet black coffin tank, chrome springer front with no fender or brakes, ape hanger bars, suicide shifter, single seat, minimal rear fender and a 12-inch wide rear tire. As a special touch in case someone didn't recognize PsychoKitty was a little off, the turn signals and brake light were chrome and shaped like skulls with bright red LED eyes. When PsychoKitty dismounted the big bike and stood up, he just kept going up until he blocked the sun. Larry guessed he was about 6'3" about 260 pounds of solid muscle, shaved bald and everything Larry could see was pierced, including a 1/2" sterling silver spike under PsychoKitty's lower lip sticking out right above a very pointy and very black goatee. He scowled at Larry, took off his dark sunglasses, and growled with a bored look in his eyes "What do you want Hair Ball, this had better be good."

"I need some merchandise, and I'm willing to pay in gold."

"Ok, I'm listening."

"I need 2 Ma Deuces with 6 spare barrels, and 10,000 rounds of Combat Mix."

"Anything else?"

"Not at this time."

"Ok, meet me here in 2 nights at the same time, and have a quarter mil worth of

gold coins. NO tricks or cops.”

Larry looked at PsychoKitty, who was carrying a huge Bowie knife that had to be at least 18 inches long with a Confederate D-handle and a 12-inch blade on his belt, and a Witness Protection shotgun slung under his heavy leather duster he wore instead of a motorcycle jacket. The word on the street was PsychoKitty was someone who was not to be trifled with, and could get anything for a price, normally a seriously extravagant price, but he always came through.

“Is it ok to bring the buyer with me?”

“Your funeral Hair Ball.”

Larry took that to mean OK, and turned to walk back to his truck while his knees were still working. He had served 3 tours of duty in the Rangers, including a tour in Afghanistan, and never met someone as Bad @ss as PsychoKitty. Larry knew that he could probably scare a couple of SEALs. Larry didn't know that PsychoKitty was a deep undercover DEA agent working to gather information on the Motorcycle-Meth connections. This was the second time he met with Larry, and knew everything about him, yet he didn't pass on any reports to his superiors about Larry's requests. They helped him keep in character, and made him some serious money, so PsychoKitty was more than willing to oblige. He really was a retired Master Chief Seal Instructor from SEAL Team 1, and when he was in the Teams, he had scared his share of SEALs. Larry would have never guessed PsychoKitty's real name was Bob Smith. Larry called Gene, and said the deal was on, they needed \$250,000 in gold coin, and to meet him in 2 days at his office at 1700 . Gene thanked Larry, and hung up. He went to get the gold, and count out 250 coins, since the latest quote for gold was just over \$1,000 per ounce. The bag was pretty big, but manageable. 2 days later, he met Larry, and they drove over to the meeting location. “Gene, just sit still and don't say anything unless you're asked a direct question, then be polite but brief. These guys are stone killers, but reliable as long as you don't cross them.”

Gene looked at Larry like he'd grown 2 heads “What the hell did you get me into?”

“You can't exactly get full-auto Ma Deuces with spare barrels and 10,000 rounds

of combat mix from the local sporting goods store. I've got a black market contact called PsychoKitty, and the name fits. You just sit in the truck and look straight ahead, and you'll be fine. I'd highly suggest keeping your hands on the dash the whole time I'm talking with him. Keep cool and everything will be fine."

They drove up to the meeting site at 1745 and waited. First they heard PsychoKitty's chopper, then the roar of a big diesel. Larry got out of the truck holding the bag of gold coins, and he was glad to see Gene sat there with his hands on the dash like Larry told him, looking straight ahead. Larry hoped the smile on PsychoKitty's face was good news.

"We got you the machine guns and some extra. The Hummer following me was security for the shipment from Barstow to Hawthorne. It's hotter than a pistol so I can't sell it. It's ballistically armored, and has it's own Ma Deuce mounted. The shipment was too good to pass up so we jacked the whole load, and got way more than you needed. Everything you ordered is in the trailer attached to the Hummer."

"Mind if I take a look?"

"Suit yourself."

They walked back to the Hummer, which was driven by a couple of hard-core outlaw bikers that Larry had never seen before, and PsychoKitty opened the trailer. Inside were 4 crates. 2 complete Ma Deuces including tripod mounts, 1 parts and maintenance kit with 6 spare barrels, and 1 crate containing 10,000 rounds of linked combat mix. It took them 20 minutes to open all the crates, and when Larry was satisfied, he handed PsychoKitty the heavy bag of gold, said "Nice doing business with you" and waited while PsychoKitty counted the coins, then closed the trailer door. He handed 5 coins each to his henchmen, who climbed out of the Hummer and walked into the biker bar while he divided the rest among his saddlebags.

"You better get that Hummer well hidden quick, they'll be out looking for it!" No sooner had PsychoKitty said that, then he kicked the kick-starter hard, and the Harley started with a series of loud pops and a roar. Larry was pleased to note that Gene was now looking his way, but hadn't taken his hands off the dash. Once

PsychoKitty was safely out of range, Larry told Gene to get his butt out of the truck and drive the Hummer. They stopped half an hour later at Larry's place. "Hopefully you've got some place to stash that Hummer. It's worth a quarter mil by itself, It's ballistically armored with a Ma Deuce already mounted."

Gene thought quickly, then realized that Hector and Maria were still driving Lonnie's Jeep, so they had room in the garage. He drove home, opened the garage, and then locked it behind him and pocketed the key. That night he was talking to Lonnie in bed. "We got a little more than we bargained for in the deal. Instead of just the machine guns, we now are the proud owners of one very hot Ballistically Armored Hummer with it's own Ma Deuce mounted on top."

"I heard all about it on the news. The driver of the Hummer and the truck were found bound and gagged with huge lumps on their heads like someone had hit them with a blackjack and the Hummer Gunner is missing. They said a 18-wheeler carrying millions of dollars of surplus equipment was en-route from Barstow to Hawthorne but never made it."

"Well I know where part of the equipment is - in the trailer in the back of the Hummer. Instead of 2 Ma Deuce 50-caliber machine guns, 6 spare barrels, and 10,000 rounds of Combat mix, we now have 3 Ma Deuces, 1 Ballistically armored and armed Hummer, an armored trailer, and a box of miscellaneous machine gun parts including 6 spare barrels. If the Military ever finds it, Christ will come back before I get out of Prison."

"In for a penny, in for a pound dear - remember we already have enough stolen Military gear to throw us in Leavenworth for not only our lives, but our kids lives as well. They can only hang us once!"

"I know, but I'm supposed to be Enforcing the law, not Breaking it!"

"I guess this is what they call Situational Ethics. You can either follow the letter of the law, and turn yourself in, or bend a few laws, keep your mouth shut, and live to a ripe old age in relative safety."

"If you put it that way, I vote for Safety. The funny thing was Larry seemed to know this guy - he was the scariest character I've ever seen."

“Larry probably dealt with him to equip his survival retreat. He couldn’t justify stealing Government property for his own use, but to save you and a bunch of other citizens of the county, I could see where he could bend a few laws. Besides, from what you told me, those Federal JackBoots were just going to use it to turn the US into a Police State. That would be a major violation of the US Constitution, and you took an oath to support and defend the Constitution.”

“Exactly, and if I were preventing someone from committing an Unconstitutional act, that would be legal!”

“Whoa, Circular Logic there Gene!”

“What do you mean?”

“You’re talking about committing an illegal act - stealing - to prevent someone else from committing another illegal act - trashing the Constitution.”

“Sounds like what a couple of ex-cons tried to convince me - they were robbing the liquor store to keep the drunks from drinking - So what do I do?”

“Learn to live with your conscience - Nobody’s perfect. Just try to always do the greater good.”

“That sounded profound!”

“I think it was Plato - he could talk circles around Hippocrates.”

“That’s right, Hippocrates said “Do no Harm”, but Plato said to do the Greater Good. I think Plato had it right. Seems if I ever get back to Law Enforcement, I’ll have a different outlook on enforcing the spirit of the law instead of the letter.”

The next morning, the contractors started showing up, and they forgot all about the machine guns and the Hummer, except to keep the garage locked and the contractors working outside where they couldn’t see anything. Hector and Gene both helped out, but Hector was a really big help working with the Hispanic Laborers, who came from the same region of Mexico he did. As they started to build the new house, Maria and Hector packed the stuff in their old house in

preparation to move it to the new one. When they were almost finished, Hector asked Gene if one of the Migrant workers who had helped build the house could move in to their old house since the building was vacant. Hector said that even sleeping on cots and air mattresses in a nice warm house beat what they would be facing that winter. Gene decided it would be OK, and Hector gave him the good news. From that day on, Hector talked to Luis more and more, and found out they were from neighboring villages, and he had an extended family nearby in Soda Springs. It would be 8 people living there, but they had food and supplies to get through the winter, they just needed a nice warm house.

The day after they moved all of Hector and Maria's stuff out, they moved Luis' stuff in, and Luis was surprised by the stuff Hector and Maria left behind that they could use, including several lever action carbines, a couple of pistols, and Hector's old shotgun, plus some stored food and supplies that they didn't have room for. Hector showed Luis about the Alternative Energy System, and how to manage the power in the winter, and that they'd need at least 10 cords of wood to keep warm. Luis's family owned an old truck, so they could use it to haul wood, and got right on it. When the building was finished, Lonnie surprised Hector and Maria by telling them they could order any furniture they needed to complete the house, and they were going to erect storage racks in their "basement" and there already were propane and diesel tanks under their house with external access ports. The front part of their "house" was in fact their garage, and then the house itself started 10 feet further back. They installed a 50KW AE system, a huge battery bank, a large cistern that tapped into the same well their house used, and a pressurization system to pressurize the water in the house.

In the center was a huge masonry heater/stove that went from floor to ceiling that Maria could cook on, and would heat the house in the winter. Hector was glad to find out Lonnie only burned 2 cords per winter to keep their house warm. He'd rather cut 2 cords than 10 each year. They decided to share the chickens, pigs, and goats while gradually expanding the flocks and herds, and the huge garden instead of growing their own. The next day, they showed up with the furniture, and spent the rest of the day arranging the furniture in Maria's new house. That night she made a special "Festival" dinner, and they all ate around Maria and Hector's large kitchen table. The house had 5 bedrooms (Maria wanted at least 4 kids) and the table could easily seat 8. It was a heavy wood table made out of a nice inexpensive wood that could be refinished. Maria liked it because the table and

legs were sturdy enough for a work surface when she wanted to make fresh tortillas and needed room to work. Whenever she had the time, Lonnie started reading Nellie's books on Herbal Medicine, and discovered her journals with her notes and secret recipes for many healing herbal concoctions that were tried and true long before "modern medicine". With the hospitals burned out shells, and any doctors or nurses hunkered down, Herbal Medicine would be all they had for a while, especially once the antibiotics and stuff that were still left were expired. Lonnie knew she had a couple of years, but decided to get right on it - she enjoyed doing something her Mother used to do - it gave her a connection she missed.

The Festival Dinner turned out to be a virtual Mexican Smorgasbord, with dozens of Mexican dishes, most of which Lonnie had never had or heard about, but were very delicious. Her favorites were the deserts that included Chocolate, she was a confirmed Choco-holic. Gene was amazed at the many dishes that included Chicken. He was glad that Maria could use the old hens in such creative ways, and part of their Costco order included all the Mexican Spices they carried, and fresh dried peppers. The last time they were in town, Hector went to the gardening center at Wal-mart, and bought a 5-gallon pail full of specialty seeds for peppers, cilantro, etc. while Lonnie stocked up on herbs and garlic seeds. With the festivities out of the way, the couples went to their separate homes, grateful for the extra privacy and space. Gene had wired the houses for a private intercom using several princess phones, a small battery connected to their charging system, and some bell wire. Picking up any phone in the house and punching 911 rang the other house. They could also ring other extensions on their line by dialing other numbers. They were to use the phones as much as possible instead of the radios, which were reserved for emergencies, or house- garden communications on the FRS radios for low-power use only. One of Larry's deputies who set up the phones was an electronics expert, which gave Gene some ideas, and he called Larry on the cellular.

"Larry, do you think Nick could convert the Claymores from manual detonation to remote wireless detonation with a high degree of security and reliability?"

"I don't see why not, let me ask him and call you back."

Two hours later, Larry called back. "Not is it only doable, but he wanted to do the same thing for his radios, but needed money for the parts - they were caught

short.”

How much does he need for the parts, and what could he use besides that, we’re rolling in dough, and I’m pretty sure FRN’s will be worthless by the end of the year.”

“I’ll get back to him.”

5 minutes later the phone rang “Gene, Nick. Decided to call you up direct instead of making Larry translate. It will take about \$5 grand worth of components to make all of our Claymores wireless like I wanted to. You’ve got 72 like I do right?”

Gene had a little more than that, but said “Yeah”, he could always use the others as spares, or wire them for manual detonation. “Ok, what did you want to do?”

“I was thinking an RC Radio Controller. The servo closes the relay and the mine goes boom!”

“Cool, how much would it cost for 2 setups?”

“Maybe \$5 grand max.”

“How you set for food, etc.”

“We’re really short of food and stuff.”

“I’ll have Larry’s Brother drop off a truckload from Costco. Give him a call, and I’ll pay the bill.”

“Where’d you get the money?”

“Nellie died in the last attack we fought off. She left some money to Lonnie. We’re not wealthy, but we can afford to do some stuff, like help out a friend.”

“Thanks Gene.”

Gene called the Contractor, and authorized up to \$10 grand worth of food and supplies from Costco to be delivered to Nick's place. He was going to build them some stuff in exchange. He called John at the bank, and got the payment arrangements taken care of.

Chapter 12

The next morning after Breakfast, Gene remembered he never got a look at the Ma Deuces and stuff he bought, so they walked out the garage, opened the door, then rolled it closed behind them. They walked back to the trailer, opened the one with the machine guns in it, and Gene said “Lonnie, there’s something funny about these machine guns!”

“What’s wrong dear?”

“No frigging triggers!”

Gene looked closely at the area where the trigger was, thought he recognized something, wrote the numbers down off the box, went inside, and fired up the computer. Once he was logged onto the internet, he Googled the numbers, and he smiled.

“Guess what, they shipped us Aircraft 50-cals instead of regular infantry Ma Deuces’.”

“So?”

“They’re designed to be remotely fired, and with Nick’s ability, I’m sure we can come up with some way to make this work for us.” Gene did some more research, called Nick, and they brain stormed. Finally he said “why not make the machine guns totally remote in a small bunker just big enough to house the machine gun, all the ammo, and a gun mounted on a powered T&E mount with either a gun shield and a pop-up mount or a turret.”

“Which would be easier to build?”

“The pop-up is way easier, and uses less materials. You can build a smaller squat bunker with a hatch just big enough to fit the gun and the pop-up mount through it, and slave a day/night camera with a good zoom to the bore, or better yet, two cameras. 1 day/night with a regular view that operates independent of the gun to scout and spot fire, and the other with a 3-20 power zoom to dial in precision fire if needed. I was thinking the whole advantage of the Ma Deuce is the 1,000 yard

plus range, so you need a big enough magnification to take advantage of it, yet still maintain your field of view so you don't lose situational awareness. I just thought of something, if you use that diamond-plate steel for a hatch, and a concrete casing for a bunker, they'll just think they're public works access hatches for something like a well or water sampling."

They spent the rest of the day designing the bunker, locating the parts they'd need and ordering like crazy. The local junkyard checked, and he had a junked 10-yard dump truck that he could cut as much ½" armor steel plate off as they needed. Gene told him to cut the whole thing up into the biggest panels he could, but no more than 6 feet square, or they'd get very difficult to move. Gene was an accomplished welder before he was a Sheriff's deputy, and now that he had the money, they bought him a mobile welding rig with a Miller Big Blue Turbo Air Pak diesel powered generator/welder/compressor, their best Oxy/Acetylene setup, and a powerful diesel generator/compressor to power the welders and any air tools he needed. They parked it next to Lonnie's Jeep in Hector's garage, and kept their garage locked since the stolen Hummer was still in it. The more Gene thought about that stolen Hummer, the less he liked keeping it until he talked to Lonnie about getting rid of it.

"What, are you Nuts? That Hummer could save our bacon if we're attacked and have to bug out - It can haul an incredible amount of stuff in the trailer, it's ballistically armored against anything less than 50 caliber, and it's got a Ma Deuce to convince anyone to pick an easier target!"

"Yeah, but the military's looking for it!"

"Well they obviously didn't know where to look, or we'd be in Leavenworth by now - they'll soon have bigger fish to fry once the wheels come off."

"You know something I don't?"

"No but I can tell by the way you're spending money like water that you don't think it will be valuable much longer, plus what I'm reading, or more importantly NOT reading on the Internet. Seems the gov't is up to it's usual, and lying through their teeth about the economy."

“Ok, Lonnie, you’re right, I’m guessing the wheels will come off in the next 6 months or so, maybe less, and all that money in the bank will be worthless or unavailable, so I wanted to spend it now and turn this place into a fortress, but a stealth fortress so we don’t attract attention. My friend Nick has been a lot of help, and they were caught short. Even if we give them enough supplies to survive, they live in a stick-built house that really isn’t as defensible as this house is.”

“You thinking about inviting him to build another earth-sheltered house next to us?”

“If it’s OK with you, that would give us 2 more adults, another woman of child-bearing age, and 2 kids. They’re all pro-gun so they shouldn’t mind our preps.”

“Ok, clear it with Hector and Maria, they’re in on this too!”

“Thanks dear, I’ll be back later.”

Gene walked over to Hector and Maria’s house, and Hector answered the door, then showed Gene inside. They were sitting on the living room couch watching the news, when Gene asked them if he could talk to them for a minute.

“Hector, Maria, we’ve managed to clear off enough brush and dead trees to add another house next to ours. I was thinking of inviting my deputy friend Nick and his family to build another Earth Sheltered house next to ours and share everything.”

“Sure, it’s OK with us. Is there anything I can do to help?”

“We’ll probably need your help working with the work crew again - it’s much easier to have someone that can translate quickly and easily so things get done right the first time.”

“Remember Luis from the first crew?”

“Sure, what’s wrong?”

“Nothing, but if we could clear some more space on this side, we could move him in next to us, and move another of the work crew into Luis’ house, since it’s way too small for his family.”

“Ok, it’s not like we don’t have the money. That will add another 4 adults, two women and a bunch of kids. I’ll tell Lonnie, and you can tell Luis the next time you see him.”

Gene got up, and Hector followed him to the door, let him out and shook his hand “Thanks for everything Gene, without you and your wife, and Nellie’s generosity, we’d be freezing somewhere or deported back to Mexico.”

“Don’t mention it Hector, without you and Maria, we would have never survived that last attack. Now with Luis and Nick’s families, we’ll be even more secure, and we still have way over a Million dollars in the bank.”

“Un Million dolares? Estas Loco?”

“Nope, Nellie told me the Reader’s Digest version before she died. Lonnie’s father had a secret life, and when Nellie caught him, she filed for divorce. In order to save his law practice, he settled for over \$1 Million in cash plus the house and contents. She moved up here, invested the money wisely, and lived off the interest, and returned the rest of the interest to accrue more interest. When she had over \$2 Million in the bank right before the Pandemic struck, she opened a Trust fund at the B of A in Reno with monthly disbursements to keep her money close in case things went south fast. The trust fund stipulated that the proceeds be deposited in Lonnie’s account on Nellie’s death, and we’ve been busy trying to spend it ever since then before the big crash hits in the next 6 months or so. If you guys could make up a list of supplies we can get locally that you think we might need in the next 10 years, then give it to me or Lonnie and we’ll order it. We have to keep this as quiet as possible so we don’t alert too many people in Reno by ordering huge quantities of stuff. Gene has volunteered to have the stuff delivered to his place, and we moved it here using the cube van to keep even the delivery company in the dark. If you need anything, please figure out some way to order it so the supplier doesn’t know where it’s going.”

“I think shipping to Gene’s place is smart, and if it’s OK with him, we should

continue, but we're going to need more diesel and propane as soon as possible, plus enough to fill 2 more 5K tanks of diesel and propane for the new houses."

"OK, I'll add it to my list."

"Vaya Con Dios, Gene!"

"Hasta La Vista Mi Amigo!"

Gene walked back to the house to talk to Lonnie. She thought it was an excellent idea, and they put it in motion immediately.

Gene called Nick, who started talking about the weapons systems. "I got a brilliant idea about those machine guns, it's just too bad you didn't get more of them. You need to wire your place with day/night TV cameras, sensors and a couple other things."

"Even if we didn't have the machine guns, you could build a mini-gun with the right barrels and parts, or even better yet, a flame-thrower."

"That would be real easy to build now that you mention it, we've got gasoline to burn, and all you need is a high-pressure low volume pump, some piping, a nozzle and some way to ignite it."

That's all well and good Nick, but I've got an even better idea, and an offer you can't refuse."

"Ok lay it on me!"

"How'd you like to move in next to Lonnie and me?"

"Sounds like an idea, but I'll have to ask Darcy, I don't know if she wants to live in a cave."

"I'll talk to you when you get here, you really need to see Hector and Maria's place anyways. Also we're going to ask Luis and his family that are staying in Hector and Maria's old cabin to move next to them. That will give us 6 extra

adults, and a bunch of kids. Should make the place way more survivable.”

Nick and Darcy showed up later that afternoon, and after introducing them to everyone, they went to Hector and Maria’s place. Gene had called first, so Hector didn’t answer the door with a shotgun. It only took 2 minutes for the gregarious Darcy to start a mixed-language conversation with Maria, whose English was now almost as good as Hector’s. Darcy spoke a little Spanish from High School, and their Mexican Maid when she was growing up in Reseda. With Maria acting as tour guide, she showed them the entire house. Darcy and Nick were taking notes, and when they realized they could design the interior any way they wanted since there were no weight-bearing walls in the design, they relaxed and started writing down ideas they wanted to copy in their house. Hector took them downstairs when Maria said she had to nurse Manny, and went to her bedroom. Nick was amazed that the basement was 2/3 the size of the living quarters. Hector explained that the propane and diesel tanks were buried underneath the garage, which was a solid concrete floor over compacted earth after the tanks were set. The rest of the living quarters rested on steel girders that supported the main floor, and carried up into the ceiling. They decided to use the column of girders as a dividing wall for the rooms, and just framed the space between the girders in with 2x4's and sheet rock.

The basement was divided up between a 50KW Outback Systems AE setup including inverters, charge controllers for the huge solar panels mounted on racks so they could take them in during the winter, or if they knew in advance they were about to get attacked to keep them from getting damaged. The wind in the winter was strong enough around there to warrant a large array of 12 Air-X wind turbines that produced about 5KW between them. Hector told them their battery banks were designed for a 24-hour backup, and they had a 1,000 gallon cistern that tapped into the community well, which was a deep artesian well that kept their cisterns full without any pumps. Next to the pump was a small demand-type pump to pressurize the house’s water system, and Hector explained that the masonry heater/stove had a built in heat exchanger to heat water, which was stored in a super-insulated tank until it was needed. The next section of the basement looked like a warehouse, and Hector said it was a warehouse with materials handling racks designed to hold pallets, a small propane-powered forklift, and a pallet jack to move pallets around and onto the freight lift. He showed them the lift, and while primitive, it worked, and wasn’t difficult to maintain.

The 4 corners of the lift held DC motors with pinion gears that meshed with 4 floor-ceiling racks that lifted and stabilized the lift platform, which was nothing more than a 8x8 platform to fit their largest pallets plus the pallet jack. It stored in the up position to keep anyone from falling down, and had several locking mechanism, including 4 locking pins for when it wasn't being used, to a set of dogs and catches that would lock and unlock as the rack ascended and descended. Over in a corner was a gun safe, and Nick asked Hector about that. "We came here with not much more than the clothes on our backs, and between Nellie, Lonnie, Gene, and the stuff the couple who used to own our old cabin left behind, they gave us a nice set of rifles and survival equipment. You already know most of Gene's preps, and I'll let him tell you about the rest." Nick shrugged and moved on. Darcy was relieved, she really wasn't into guns, and her small children Jill (5) and Mike (4) were with them, and she wanted to keep them as far away from guns as possible, even though her husband was a deputy, which she saw as a job, not a career. Nick got into the Sheriff's department because he loved guns, and didn't understand his wife's views. She tolerated them as a necessary evil, but never really got into it like Nick did. As a result, his collection had a few holes in it. He had a Bushmaster flat-top HBAR rifle with the rail, and several different sights, his Browning A-bolt in .308, and a Mossberg 500 that he told Darcy was to stay loaded 24/7 as their "home defense gun", still she made him keep it in a closet near the door. Nick kept telling her it was easier and safer to "gun proof" their kids, than to "Kid proof" their guns, but Darcy grew up with all the worst of the anti-gun programming in school and the media, and wasn't swayed. Nick hoped moving next to Lonnie, who Darcy thought was a "gun nut" might rub off on Darcy.

As they walked back upstairs, they walked into the kitchen. In the center of the house was the masonry stove heater with a built-in cook-top, and a full width kitchen/dining area, and a second full-width wall that tied into the columns at that point. Darcy thought that explained why her kitchen seemed so roomy, it was the full width of the house with a dining table on the other side from the sink and counters, with the wood-fired cookstove in the center of the room. They finished the grand tour, and Nick met with Gene again, and told him they could move in as soon as they sold their house. Seems someone from Sacramento wanted their house to escape the rat race, and offered \$150 thousand for it, which was over market. "Why wait, let's get you started moving in here, and you can buy supplies with the difference between what you owe and what you clear on your house."

We've got money to burn, and it's not going to be worth anything in the near future." As they were walking out the front door, Darcy spotted Hector's Mossberg 500 over the door and sarcastically asked Gene why they kept a loaded gun over the door.

"You guys take your security seriously here don't you Gene?"

"Darcy, we're VERY serious about Security. Larry's told Nick and I some stuff that would give you nightmares, and we're seeing the start of the final slide already."

"What do you mean - the stores are open, and everyone's working."

"Yeah, but in the last year, prices have almost doubled again, Diesel's up to almost \$5.00 per gallon, and food and supplies are twice what they were before the pandemic. The prices can't go much higher before there's Hyperinflation, and then the economy collapses!"

"Why would it collapse?"

"Buyers and sellers couldn't keep up with the rapidly changing prices, and wages would quickly get wiped out by rapidly accelerating prices. Once the Federal Reserve starts monetizing the debt, like I think they are starting to, the value of the dollar will plummet as foreign banks and investors suddenly try to sell off their less valuable dollars. Just in the last month, gold's gone from \$1200 per ounce to \$1400 per ounce, and it's still going up. Silver's over 12 dollars per ounce. We need to quickly spend all our FRN-based assets, and either buy precious metals, supplies, weapons, ammo, or equipment. That also means you can't carry a mortgage on your house. We'll build your house for you, and you use the money you get from the sale to buy as much food, clothing, and supplies as you can. We've got a deal with John at B of A to buy stuff from Costco and ship it up here. If you want to place a large order from Costco, that's the way to do it. The last time we ordered, we ordered a half-million dollars worth of stuff, and it took a double-trailer 18-wheeler 3 trips to carry it all. We're going to set you up with a 50K Alternative Energy System, a Masonry Heater/Stove, and tie you into our water system. When they dig your basement and set your tanks, they'll dig and trench your septic system as well." "Nick, we're going to set you up with an

earth-sheltered Quonset hut just like ours. Hopefully you didn't sell the furniture with the house, it's getting harder to get furniture in Reno."

"Nope, we're keeping our furniture. I've got a diesel truck, and 2,000 gallons of fuel, but we'll have problems digging up the tank and moving it."

"I'll talk to the fuel distributor about setting you up with the same setup we have. A 5K diesel tank and a 5K propane tank buried deep under our houses, with access ports to fill them up. If you remember, Hector and Maria's house, they've got their garage in front, and they still had enough room for a 5-bedroom house inside the Quonset hut. One thing you'll have to get used to is living in artificial light. Lonnie used to call her mom's house The Cave, now she loves how warm and temperate it is - we light the whole house with ceiling-mounted florescent fixtures that combine a warm and cool bulb in a 48-inch fixture to simulate daylight close enough that indoor plants grow just fine."

They were standing there talking while Hector ran out, yelled something about "Banditos" and pointed down the driveway. Gene went into "Oh Shit" mode, told Hector to take Darcy and the kids and get them in the basement with Maria, then call Lonnie and tell her to get in the basement, and to NOT use the radios unless it's an emergency. Next he turned and said "Nick, you're with me!" and they ran to Gene's garage where they were hiding the Hummer. "Quick, get in you Kevlar Vest and get behind the gun. You've got more time with the Old Broad than I do. Once I stop, shoot anything in front of us that's moving. Try to conserve ammo, that's all we've got right now, the rest is in the trailer. I'll bail out and try to help out with the grenade launcher." Seconds later, Nick jumped in the passenger door and wiggled his way into the gunners' seat, opened the hatch, stood up, and unlocked the travel lock on the Ma Deuce. Meanwhile Gene put his vest and LBV on, and climbed into the driver's seat. He started the Hummer, and drove out the door into a scene right out of Mad Max. A horde of scumbags were driving down the fire road right to their house led by a Toyota King Cab 4x4 with huge tires and a 30-caliber machine gun mounted in back. He was followed by several jeeps and trucks full of scumbags.

Gene slid to a stop about 400 yards away from the raiders crossing the T of their advance, threw the transmission into Park, and no sooner had he exited the driver's side door, putting the bulk of the Hummer between him and the dirtbags,

then Nick opened up with the 50. The noise was horrific, like a giant beating on a steel plate with a 50 pound sledge hammer. “BOOM...BOOM...BOOM...BOOM” Gene was glad that Nick was firing short bursts to save ammo. Gene reached in, took out his M4/M203 and a bandoleer of HE and HEDP rounds, and loaded an HE round into the breech of the M203 in case they got within range. Nick kept firing 5-shot bursts, and his second burst hit the Toyota’s radiator, wrecking the truck. His 3rd burst caught the driver in the chest, blowing his heart to pieces, and the 5th round from his 3rd burst walked up high enough to take out the machine gunner, taking the scumbag’s biggest gun out of the game.

Nick engaged the next vehicle in line, and finally the raiders got within range of Gene’s grenade launcher, so he started aiming and firing rounds as quickly as he could. The 40mm grenades had a telling effect. Each one that hit a vehicle started it burning, forcing the survivors to abandon their vehicles they were using for cover. Gene saw this, plunked down a few more grenades, and soon all their vehicles were burning. He scanned the battlefield, and any movement took a bullet. An hour later, he detected no living raiders and Nick had ceased fire almost half an hour ago. He climbed down from his vulnerable perch and joined Gene behind the Hummer. Suddenly their FRS radios came to life. Lonnie had called the Sheriff, who was en-route in his cruiser. Gene told her to call him back and to tell him to use caution, he was pretty sure the invaders were all dead, but some might be playing possum and waiting for dark. An hour later, Larry’s Suburban drove up Code 3. Gene took advantage of the distraction to see if any raiders responded to the noise. One moved, and Gene shot him in the forehead to make sure. Larry drove around the raiders, and pulled up next to Gene’s Hummer, then got out carefully on the side away from the raiders.

“Any idea what happened here?”

“They weren’t here to sell Girl Scout Cookies.”

“Glad you were able to use that hummer, looks like those raiders were well armed. I saw at least 3 machine guns attached to the rigs.”

“I’m really glad Nick was here, he manned the Ma Deuce while I drove. He’s deadly with that gun.”

“Well I didn’t see any live ones. Let’s mount up and check for survivors.”

Gene handed Nick his spare M4, then thinking quickly, removed his magazine, and loaded a fresh magazine. Larry took the lead, while Gene and Nick took left and right flank respectively. Larry recognized the leader as a violent 3-time loser for murder, armed Robbery, Kidnapping and aggravated Rape of a minor. He didn’t recognize any of the others, but when Hector made his way out “to watch their six” he claimed, he thought he recognized several members of Larry’s brother Dale’s crew. Larry got on the phone, had a heated conversation with his brother, who arrived an hour later. After looking at the bodies, he was much more subdued, and admitted that most of the scumbags were from his crew.

“Damn it Dale, how many times do I have to tell you to run background checks before you hire guys!”

Dale was doubly devastated, with the bulk of his crew cooling in on the blood-soaked ground, he was effectively out of business, and said so.

Hector spoke up “Not necessarily sir.”

Dale looked at Hector, hoping he had the answer.

“Luis told me there’s a whole bunch of trained Mexicans willing to work construction, they just don’t speak English. If you could hire them, Luis could act as supervisor, and I could interpret and teach them English in my spare time while we worked on both houses.”

“BOTH houses?”

“Forgot to tell you, we now want two houses built next to the existing houses. Same deal as last time.

Dale shook their hands, and turned to leave. Just then Maria called for Hector on the radio, and he told everyone to follow him. They ran back to Hector’s house, naturally carrying their guns thinking it was an emergency, only to see Maria nursing Manny like nothing was wrong, but Darcy was sobbing hysterically on the couch. Maria talked gently to Hector, who took the guys back in the kitchen and

explained.

“It seems that when they got to the basement, Maria pulled out her Glock and Darcy freaked out. Maria got in her face, called her a bunch of names and told her to quit being a worthless woman and defend her kids. Once I gave her the all clear, Maria holstered her gun, and walked back upstairs without a word, leaving Darcy crying there.”

Larry spoke up. “Nick, if you want some help, now’s the time to shock her into getting with the program.”

“OK, might as well get this over with, she’s been barely tolerating my guns and preparedness for so long that we were caught flatfooted by this emergency, and would have died if it weren’t for Gene.”

Nick went to his wife’s side, and as soon as she felt the familiar touch, she held him and dissolved into tears. Finally when she was done crying, Nick told her “Darcy, we need to show you something out front.”

He led her by the hand, and as she got close to the dead bodies, she recoiled in fear.

“What did you want to show me?”

“Right here, all around you. These guys weren’t here to sell Girl Scout cookies, and if it weren’t for Gene’s Hummer with that monster machine gun, we’d all be dead.”

She turned to Larry and screamed “This is all your fault!”

Larry decided to try the “bad cop” approach.

“Ma’am, I don’t know what bullshit you’ve been told by the schools and the media, but according to the US Supreme Court, the ONLY time we have to protect you is if you’re in Police Custody, otherwise, if we’re there, we’ll do our best. You need to get with the program and accept that unless you’re willing to defend yourself and your kids, you’re going to die horribly and possibly get gang raped

and watch your kids get it too before you die. Am I making myself clear enough! The rules are out the window. If you can't or won't defend yourself, you WILL die."

Larry stalked off for Nick to try his "good cop" approach. Darcy was sobbing again, and Nick said "If you're willing to learn, Gene and I can help you learn to defend yourself, but you have to want to. I can't be there all the time, so you have to learn how to defend yourself and the kids. Also they need to get gun-proofed ASAP since we'll be carrying loaded guns from here on out in case we get attacked again."

"What if we were just to move home, we wouldn't be a target there!"

"We're just as much of a target in a nice house, we're just totally defenseless. With what I have at the house, we wouldn't have lasted 30 seconds into this attack, let alone kill almost 50 raiders who were after God knows what."

Darcy went back to crying, and Gene hoped Nick had gotten through, or Darcy could be more of a liability than an asset. He'd give her a couple of days to calm down and get with the program, then he'd sic Lonnie on her. Lonnie could finish the "de-sheeplication" process like she did with her mom. The next day, they buried the raiders in a slit trench, took any useful weapons, and pushed the vehicles over a nearby cliff out of the way. Nick called, and they had a list of stuff to buy in Reno to complete their security arrangements. Gene agreed that it was now top priority, and waited for Nick to meet him at their house and they made a trip to Reno to raid several electronics warehouses for parts, and a security company for the cameras. Gene was amazed that everyone was willing to take checks. John at the bank had broken all records getting them their new checks for their joint account, and even ATM/Debit and credit cards just in case. Gene realized this was the lull before the storm, since stocks were down, and prices were going up, but for the man with all the money, it was cheap at twice the price. He spent FRN's instead of gold, and actually managed to buy more to fill their 3rd gun safe they bought with gold and silver coins and bars. Nick wasn't around when he made those purchases, preferring to deal directly with John, who arranged the purchases of the silver and gold, and delivery by a special armored van that looked just like a regular Ford Econoline, but was armored and armed.

They worked on the design for the automated machine gun, coming up with and rejecting dozens of ideas as either too impractical, unrealistic, or obvious. What Gene wanted was a gun turret that looked like anything BUT a gun turret until it started firing, and would protect the gun, and give them a 270 degree field of fire (they were situated on the Northwest and Southwest corners of the house, with the Eastern half of the house backing into an impassibly steep and trackless mountain. The only way down was to rappel down, and the brush was too thick to allow even that. Still they sited a camera looking back up the mountain, and a proximity detector that would go off if anything approached within 50 feet. Nick and Gene were becoming closer friends as they spent more and more time together. Lonnie spent several hours per day visiting with Maria when Gene was off running on one of his mad moments. Her Spanish was improving as rapidly as Maria's English. As a result, all three infants heard a confusing combination of English and Spanish for several hours per day, but Lonnie always spoke to Jake and Nellie in English, and Maria always spoke to Manny in Spanish.

Gene called and said "good thing you mentioned wanting two Quonset huts, the County was about to sell the last two in storage, now I can get them to store them for a month or two until you're ready to install them. Dale hired the entire crew Luis suggested. As near as I can tell, they've got no criminal background, and all have their families living with them. When you have time, you might check some of the other abandoned cabins up there and see if they'd work better than the apartment they're living in."

"I'll have Hector and Luis work on it after hours once the project gets close to being finished. Any troubles getting fuel?"

"None at all, that's the strange thing, except the price keeps going up."

"We need to make a prioritized list and spend as much of our remaining FRN's on supplies, fuel, or precious metals in case the economy collapses."

"With as many people as you have there, you should have a much bigger flock of animals and a bigger barn, I'd add that to the list. I also know of several farmers that want to sell excess chicks, pigs, goats, etc. or are willing to trade."

"Is there anything else you'd recommend buying from PsychoKitty?"

“I’ll let you know.”

Chapter 13

The next morning, Gene got a call from Nick that he needed him and Lonnie over there ASAP and to bring the kids. He told Lonnie, and they loaded the Hummer and drove over there, expecting the worst.

When he saw them piling out of the Hummer wearing their LBV's, Nick laughed and said "I guess I should have been more specific. Darcy's about ready to come over to the dark side, but really needs to have a girl-talk with Lonnie. If she could bring the babies in with her, it might reinforce the image. Besides I'm pretty sure Darcy's pregnant."

"That would explain the emotional issues. I'll go easy on her, you guys amuse yourselves out here doing whatever you do when we're away."

"If you mean drinking beer and girl watching, there's no girls to watch out here, and I think Nick's fresh out of beer."

"I've got a cold 6-pack of Miller in the fridge if you want one."

"Works for me, at least we'll have something to do."

"Let's go in the basement and work out some design issues I thought about those machine guns. Shooting it the other day reminded me of a few things."

With that Lonnie unbuckled Nellie and Jake from their seat belts, and carried them into the house in their baby carriers. Darcy met her at the door and offered to help. Lonnie wisely let her help, carrying two baby carriers was a big task. She set the carriers on the living room floor, and Darcy offered her some tea. Once they got situated, Darcy asked Lonnie what she thought about yesterday.

"Scared the Crap out of me, but this isn't even the second time I've been attacked."

"Oh?"

"My mom died defending us in the last attack when all we had was some lousy

semi-auto rifles to defend ourselves with, and Nellie got hit by a lucky bullet that ricocheted off the gun port and almost decapitated her. As much as I miss her, I'm grateful it wasn't Gene."

"Why's that?"

"Nellie's my mom, but Gene is my husband and father of my children. There are 3 people in this world right now that I'd lay down my life to protect. My two babies and Gene. I know Gene feels the same way about us. They went out charging down those raiders in a Hummer with a big machine gun, and they could have wound up dead. Luckily they were up against amateurs with inferior firepower, and their 50 destroyed the raiders' vehicles before the attack even began."

"How can you even want guns in the house?"

"I'm carrying right now. The first time I was attacked was on my way to my Mom's house a couple of years ago. I stopped just outside Sacramento at an all-night gas station with credit card pumps wearing my filter mask when a truckload of trailer trash showed up and tried to kidnap and rape me. They claimed they wanted to "party" but I shot the one closest to me when he got too close with his Bowie knife. I put a .45 round right through his snot locker and blew what was left of his brains right out the back of his head, then I swivelled and told the rest of the creeps to beat it before they joined him. They high-tailed it out of there, and I left moments later before the police showed up."

"Why didn't you wait for the cops?"

"Darcy, it's illegal to carry concealed in California without a very hard-to-get concealed weapons permit. If the police would have shown up, I'd still be in jail or worse."

Lonnie could see by the look on Darcy's face that her train of thought had come to a complete stop. She decided to nudge it in another direction.

"I used to be just like you until I met James, my live-in boyfriend when I was working in LA. He was into survivalism, and guns, but basically because he was sure the Chinese were going to invade any day. As it turned out, they didn't

invade, but all his preps, and the stuff I learned from him saved my life at least twice. The first time he asked me to go shooting, I looked at him like he had just asked me to help him rob a bank, and over several years, between his gentle persuasion and reading stories on the news about people getting killed for the slightest reason in LA made me decide to first learn to shoot, then to carry a gun in my Bug Out Bag, then finally once the balloon went up, to carry concealed. Right now there is NO law and order, we're on our own. Whether you and your kids live or die is up to you and Nick, and he can't be there all the time. You might want to try going shooting with me while the guys are working on their projects. It's fun, and I'm a lot easier to learn from than your husband."

Darcy looked at Lonnie with tears in her eyes, then smiled and said "OK, how about tomorrow morning. We'll ride over to your place, and the guys can do whatever they were going to, and you can start to teach me how to shoot."

"I'm not only going to teach you how to shoot, but everything I know about guns and tactics, also what is called Situational Awareness. It doesn't do much good to have a gun if you don't realize the signs that you're about to get into trouble."

"Ok, see you over at your place tomorrow. Thanks Lonnie." She stood up to give her a girl hug, and Lonnie apologized when she leaked all over her. "Oops, is there someplace I can feed Nellie and Jake?"

"Sure use the spare bedroom."

They picked up the babies and carried them into the other room. Lonnie told Darcy she could stay if she wanted to talk, the kids didn't take that long to feed, and she wasn't embarrassed since she and Maria fed their kids in front of each other all the time, and talking helped to pass the time. Darcy nodded, closed the door to keep the kids out and Lonnie sat down, unbuttoned her top, and Darcy handed her first Nellie then Jake. She cradled each infant in an arm so it could find a nipple, then she sat back in the chair and relaxed. Darcy sat there dumbfounded that Lonnie could relax while topless in front of another woman. Finally Lonnie said "Have a seat, there's nothing to hide here. Women's breasts were designed to feed children, so there's nothing wrong with using them for that purpose. I'm not shy anymore anyway. I probably wouldn't do this in public, but in my house or a friend's house it doesn't bother me."

Eventually Darcy settled down and started talking. “Did Nick tell you I’m pregnant?”

“He mentioned you might be, how are you fixed for diapers and stuff?”

“We’re really short, even after that supply run you guys paid for. I wasn’t pregnant at the time, and thought we were through having kids, then I ran out of BC pills, and you know the result.”

“Oops! Good thing we’ve got diapers and stuff. That reminds me. Gene’s pretty sure we won’t be able to buy anything for FRN’s after the next 6 months or so, I need you to make an extensive list of everything you are going to need for 10 years worth of supplies, and we’ll buy it and store it underneath your new house. Last time we bought from Costco, we ordered half a million dollars worth of stuff, and it took a double-trailer rig 3 trips to bring it all up here. Larry has offered us to use his place as a drop-off place so no one in Reno knows we’re ordering such large quantities, and we want to keep it that way. I’ve got an agreement with John at the B of A to order stuff for us, charge a 15% markup and have it delivered, so we’ve been using that instead of driving into Reno for the most part.”

Darcy got out a legal pad and started a list right then and there, both to write stuff down, and to keep from staring at Lonnie’s enormous breasts. Finally Nellie and Jake were full, and Darcy helped her burp them and Lonnie buttoned back up her blouse.

“You go braless all the time?”

“I have to nurse these little chow hounds several times a day, and taking a bra on and off that often is a pain. Besides, I don’t think I could find a bra to fit in town anyway. I’ve gained at least 2 cup sizes since I got pregnant.”

“I was trying not to stare but you must be at least a 44DD.”

“That’s probably right, the last bra I bought in LA was a 40D.”

“Doesn’t it hurt?”

“My back does get sore, but breast milk is the only available food, and I’ve got twins to feed, so in a way I’m grateful they’re big enough, I don’t know what I would do if I couldn’t feed them.”

“I’m glad I never had twins, caring for 1 baby at a time is hard enough.”

“Yeah, but this way, I get over having 4 kids twice as fast!”

“You want 4 kids! Why?”

“I always wanted a large family since I was an only child, and Gene explained to me that once the diesel runs out, we’ll need large families to accomplish the daily tasks with muscle power or horse power. Good thing you’re pregnant too, three kids will help with the chores later.”

“Yeah, but I don’t know if I can survive natural childbirth.”

“It’s no picnic, especially delivering twins, but once it’s over and you feel your baby nursing, you realize all that pain had a purpose, to bring a child into the world.”

The next day, Gene and Nick finished installing the “security system” and showed everyone how to use it. They set up a pair of invisible electronic eyes watching the road. 1 was way down the fire road, almost 2 miles away, and the other covered the junction of the fire road and their fire road/driveway, which was still a mile from the house. Their fire road was covered by overlapping zones of claymores set up to sequentially fire by turning a knob on the panel, lifting a security gate protected by a breakable wire, and pressing the big red button. Each number on the panel marked 1-30 controlled a gang of 3 claymores. The idea was to locate the lead vehicle, fire the claymore gang as it crossed into that zone, then fire the gang that matched the tail-end charlie, then quickly target the rest of them. They used a pair of day/night cameras with a high zoom and image intensification, and a 3rd camera that only saw in infrared for night use. All the cameras were situated in clear bullet-proof pods and well hidden all over the compound. With the cameras, it only took 1 person to guard the place, freeing everyone else up for other projects. They all kept their FRS/GMRS radios on in scan mode, and they had a dedicated EMERGENCY frequency to be used for attack warnings only.

Gene made it clear the radios were to be used for emergency or urgent messages only to people outside the houses. The telephones were to be used for routine communications.

Later that day, Larry called, and said that they might be interested in joining an organized group of scavengers that Reno/Washoe County was setting up to clean out abandoned commercial buildings of any valuables, and to provide housing for refugees. Scavengers would be paid in scavenged goods, and they could pick or choose what they wanted, and if anyone wanted to do some freelance scavenging, they needed to check in with the Washoe County Sheriff's department, tell them where they were going, and contribute at least 50% of the haul to the county. Larry thought the freelance scavenging was an excellent idea. They didn't need much, but Gene and Nick had the 40-foot cube van with a bobtail loading gate, and could score a large quantity of new cloth diapers from several diaper services in town where the owners had been dead for a while. Gene thought that was an excellent idea, and whoever thought that idea up at Washoe County deserved a medal. Abandoned merchandise was going to waste, and organizing the salvage would make things easier on the remaining law enforcement. Larry called the Assistant Sheriff of Washoe County, and said that he was sending two deputies in a 40-foot cube van to assist, and they would like to work as freelancers with specific items needed by Sierra County residents. He told Larry to have them show up at 0800 tomorrow with their vehicle, LEO ID's and he'd take care of it. Larry called back and gave Gene the particulars. They were to leave their heavy weapons in the vehicle, but they could wear their vests and LBV's, plus carry their sidearms. Gene asked if sidearms included subguns. Larry laughed when the lightbulb went on, and agreed. Their H&K MP-5SD's they had wouldn't look as intimidating to the average citizen, but they were just as well armed for CQB as they would be with their M-4's.

Lonnie wasn't happy with Gene going scavenging, but when he told her they had the government's blessing, and were going after a targeted list of items including a large supply of new cloth diapers, she settled down. No one in Reno sold cloth diapers anymore, and they had almost exhausted their supply of disposables. The few cloth diapers they had were looking ratty and needed replacement. Nick agreed in a heartbeat to help, since he wasn't much of a carpenter or mason, and between Hector and Luis, the new crew of Mexican workers were working faster and better than Dale's previous crew. They drove into Reno, parked in the front

driveway of the Washoe County Sheriff's department, left all their weapons except their pistols and the rest of their Sam Browne gear they normally carried as Deputies, and as a final touch, wore their Sierra County deputy badges pinned to their LBVs. The Assistant Sheriff met with them, gave them a list of the known abandoned businesses in Washoe County, ran their badge numbers and ID's through the system, then handed them Washoe County Reservist badges to wear while they were in Washoe County on official business like scavenging for the county. They were told they could arrest people, but weren't expected to, and if they needed prisoner transport to call dispatch on their radios. He gave them the Washoe County dispatch frequency, and they programmed it into their Motorola radios.

"Gentlemen, Washoe County appreciates your help, but please understand we're acting under emergency orders from the Sheriff and the Governor, so don't abuse your privileges since you're not technically full-time NV law enforcement. The reservist badges should work for now. Don't deviate from this list. If you see abandoned property that's not on the list, call it in, but do not enter without notifying dispatch, or you could accidentally come under fire from NG units as looters. Here's a couple of stickers for your truck to help prevent friendly fire incidents. Good day gentlemen, and good luck. One last thing, you don't have to stop here anymore, check in and out with dispatch, and stop at the Convention Center on the way out of town every day to deposit the County's share."

They shook the Assistant's hand, and made their way to the truck. They put the small green Washoe County Sheriff logo sticker on the windshield driver's side, and put the big ones on each side of the van where everyone could see them. They got back in, started the motor, and consulted their list and their Thomas Guide. While Gene drove, Nick made a sequential list of places to check. The first was the laundry/diaper service. When they got there, they found what they were looking for and more. They backed the truck up to the loading dock, rolled 4 pallets full of new diapers, and 2 cases of clean diapers into the cube van, then stacked cases of detergent and baby supplies on top. They were as full as they could get, so they went back to the Convention center, called dispatch and told them they were unloading at the Convention Center, then heading to CA. They had plenty of help unloading at the Convention Center, and were homeward bound with 2 pallets of diapers and a dozen cases of detergent and baby stuff. They stopped at Larry's house, who told Gene to keep everything unless they couldn't

use it, then the County could designate a drop-off and storage point for surplus goods. They unloaded the truck, and Nick said he'd meet him back there at 0800, there was tons of businesses on the County's list.

While they were busy scavenging, Lonnie took the liberty of ordering another massive load of stuff from Costco, and renting another 40-foot bobtail cube van to move stuff back and forth from Larry's place. With Maria watching the kids, she hoped that her and Darcy could take 1 or two loads per day from Larry's place to their house. After a week of scavenging, they stopped in a sporting goods store to window shop. The owner complained that everyone was a bunch of "Lookie-loos" but no one could afford to buy guns. That peeked Gene's interest, and he asked a dumb question "whatcha got?"

"I just got a huge delivery from my distributor before the balloon went up, and if I don't sell the lot of it, the bank will foreclose on my note and I'll be out of business."

"You have a list of what you need to sell?"

Seeing they were both reservists, he showed them a list of guns. He had a dozen 10/22's 120 Ramline hot lips 25rd magazines, 10 Bushmaster flat-top HBAR AR-15's and 100 30-round magazines, a dozen Glock Model 21's and a dozen Model 19's with 5 spare drop-free high-cap magazines for each gun, a Bladetech IWB holster and 5 single-mag carriers plus a SAS thigh holster for each gun, 30 cases (30K rounds) of 9mm JHP 115gr Winchester Silvertips, and 30 cases of Cor-bon 45acp 200 gr JHP ammo, 50 cases (50K rounds) of Winchester .223/556 ammo, a dozen Mossberg 590's with the 8-shot magazine and the bayonet lug, a dozen Ka-bar M9 bayonets, 30 cases of Federal Tactical 00 Buck and 10 cases of Federal Tactical 1oz slugs. He had 4 Bushmaster A3 .308 caliber rifles and 48 20-round magazines plus 8 cases (8K rounds) of Lake City .308 match from the same lot, and a bunch of Simmons, Nikon, and Redfield scopes including mounts, bases, several laser boresighters, cleaning kits, reloading components, 2 Dillon reloaders: an XL-650 set up to reload 9mm, 45acp, .223, and .308, plus an SL-900 set up to reload 12 gauge.

"What would you want if we took the whole list if it's still available?"

“It’s still available, I didn’t have room to un-box it. It’s still in the original packing. I’ll sell the whole thing for 20% over wholesale cost, and I’ll even take a check, and waive the background check fee.”

Gene was glad he got a NV driver’s license and never applied for his CA license, so they could do the background check as if he was a NV resident. He was getting pretty good at this “Situational Ethics” thing! The dealer pulled his packing lists and orders, and showed them to Gene, then added 20%. Gene knew he was getting a deal, and wrote the check right there.

“I hope you’ve got a loading dock. We’ve got a 40-foot cube van, and will probably need all of it to haul this load.”

“Officer, I’m just glad you’re taking it off my hands. The bank was breathing down my neck, and was going to foreclose next week. Now I can pay them off, and have some money left over. If there’s anything you ever need, here’s my card, and I’ll sell you anything I have for 20% over cost.”

Because Gene was a LEO, the background check actually was almost instant, and the check cleared, so the dealer told them to drive around back, and he’d help them load. It took them longer than normal to get home, then Gene remembered all that ammo was heavy.

Chapter 14

When Gene finally got around to inventorying their guns and ammo, he realized he had 10 10/22's but NO ammo (500 rounds max) and decided to call the gun dealer to rectify that situation.

“Gene, good thing you called, the bank isn’t going to loan me any more money to make any more purchases, and I’ve got 2 weeks on my lease. I’ll sell you anything in the store for 10% over cost, or if you buy enough stuff, I’ll sell it to you for cost.”

“Ok, I need as much .22 ammo as you have.”

“I’ve got 10 cases of CCI 22lr Mini-Mag sitting in the back still in the distributor’s boxes. I should have sold that to you when I did the other deal. I’ll sell them at cost to make up for you having to make a separate trip.”

“Great, I’ll be down there with a checkbook in two hours. I’m liable to buy out the whole store, I’m not sure how much longer FRN’s are going to be worth much.”

“That’s basically what the bank said was they didn’t want to be stuck with a loan based on a bunch of worthless FRN’s, so I’m selling, getting my money out, and buying what supplies I can.”

“Ok, see you in a couple of hours.”

Gene called Nick, gave him the Reader’s digest version, and said he’d be right over with Darcy and they could kill 2 birds with 1 stone so to speak - Darcy wanted Lonnie to teach her how to shoot.

“Great this way we can replace all the ammo she’ll shoot.”

Half an hour later, Nick and Darcy showed up with their kids. The kids and the two infants went over to Maria’s place. She didn’t mind babysitting, and it allowed her to work on her English skills by studying along with the kids, and reading to them from the “Dick and Jane” primers that Nellie had stored along

with a good selection of books she used to home-school Lonnie.

When Gene and Nick got there, they looked at Mike's inventory, and there wasn't a dog in the inventory, they were either good hunting rifles, shotguns, brand-name revolvers and pistols in common calibers, a small selection of semi-auto "assault rifles" in .223 and .308, and a smaller selection of large-caliber scoped hunting rifles. As far as ammo went, the smallest quantities were for the large-caliber magnum rifles. He had another 10 cases of miscellaneous .22 ammo, 3 cases each of .38 Special, .357 Magnum, 9mm fmj, 9mm 115gr jhp, .40S&W 180gr jhp, .45acp 230gr fmj, .45acp 200gr jhp, 10mm 175gr jhp, and 1 case of .44 Magnum 240gr jhp hunting ammo. He had 5 cases of .223 55gr fmj, and 2 cases of .308 180gr SPBT hunting ammo. He had less than case quantities of 7mm Magnum and the other 30-caliber Magnum hunting rounds. Mike showed him the invoices for the merchandise in the store, and as they were walking around, Gene asked who owned the fixtures.

"I do - why you ask?"

"If I buy all this, I'm going to need some extra safes, and you've got some florescent lights and stuff I could use. I don't need the counters or cash register, but I could use your gunsmithing tools and stuff too. If you can make me an offer, I'll clean you out right now, including everything but the counters and the carpeting and drapes."

Mike started figuring what he paid for stuff, then deducted the depreciation on them. The safes were 10 years old, had he really been in business that long? He guessed he had, but now was time to get while the going was good. Gene was a Godsend, no one would be interested in his shop if he couldn't get financing. With that in mind, he charged Gene cost on everything, and practically gave him 6 safes, his inventory of gunsmithing tools, several used reloading machines and all his reloading dies, all his reloading components and accessories, dozens of storage racks, several boxes of florescent tubes, and several miscellaneous boxes of supplies he had in the store. He called his friend, who brought his two college-age sons with him, and they got the entire store loaded in Gene's cube van that afternoon. Mike already knew that Gene's check was good when he called to verify the balance on the previous check and the teller said he had a low-6 figure balance. Gene paid the friend and his sons for helping them load, and when they

drove out the driveway, Gene was in low gear much longer than he thought he had to be, and realized this might be seriously overloaded and this could be a long trip. He called Lonnie and left a message on her cell phone saying they had bought the whole store including 6 safes and it might take them a while to get home, like around dark.

2 hours later, Lonnie called back. He told her they were just cresting the pass, and they would hopefully be home in an hour or so. Once he got over the top of Donner pass, Gene finally got the truck moving faster than 20 mph, and used 4th gear on the short downhill run to cool off the very hot diesel engine. Once it was back down in the normal zone, he reached the bottom of the hill, and put the throttle on the floor to carry as much speed as possible up the short grade to Truckee. As the truck slowed down again, he downshifted to match RPM's and keep the truck climbing as quickly as possible. When he cleared the final uphill grade of the pass, he knew he was home free, but he still had to be careful with the overloaded truck. By the time they got home, it was full dark, and Lonnie suggested they stay the night since the kids were already fed and it wouldn't be smart to drive after dark in these conditions, besides, dinner was ready. Nick decided they could stay overnight when Darcy took their spare clothing bag out of the truck that they always kept packed in winter.

Lonnie had made Chilli and cornbread for dinner, and they talked for hours after dinner. Darcy proudly showed Nick the first target she shot. Lonnie decided to have her shoot Nellie's Colt Commander when she saw how small her hands were. After a couple of mags, she got the hang of it, and routinely put all 6 rounds in the 4-inch sticker in the target out to 15 yards which was about the maximum defensive range for that gun. Next Lonnie showed her how to shoot an AR-15. She picked the least menacing-looking one they had, the HBAR flattop with a Simmons 3x9x40 scope. She started at 25 yards standing, and by the end of the day was shooting 6-inch groups at the 100 yard target standing and prone. Not fantastic shooting, but it would get the job done. Later that afternoon, Lonnie introduced her to the Mossberg 590, and remembering she had to defend her kids, decided to try it out since Lonnie said it was the best home defense weapon they had. She didn't like the recoil, but she liked what it did to the target. At 15 feet there was 1 big hole in the center of the target, and at 15 yards, the center of the target looked like someone had fired a couple of magazines full of 45acp ammo at it. Nick was amazed, his "sheeple" wife was now shooting almost as well as he

could. He leaned over and whispered in her ear “Welcome to the Dark Side, Young Skywalker!” in a perfect Darth Vader voice. He said it loud enough that everyone heard it and cracked up laughing. They told stories for a couple of hours, and realizing it was late, they said goodnight and went to bed.

The next morning Lonnie woke up to the smells of breakfast cooking and said to herself “what the...” and got dressed in her bathrobe and slippers.

“I hope you didn’t mind. I’m always an early riser, and the kids were up, so while I made them breakfast, I went ahead and made enough for everyone.”

“Mind - of course I don’t mind. I love sleeping in, it’s something I rarely get to do any more between feeding Jake and Nellie, and taking care of this house. Thanks for making breakfast. I’ll get dressed and we’ll be right out.” She walked back in their bedroom, and 5 minutes later, they came out dressed. Nick almost bumped into them in the hallway, and said “I see Darcy’s up to her usual, up at dawn and already had breakfast made. If I didn’t have to go to work, I could never get up before 10. I was really glad when Larry gave me 2nd shift.” They sat down to a breakfast of bacon, eggs, pancakes and coffee. While they pigged out, they told Darcy she could make breakfast anytime. Lonnie thought Darcy cooked like her mom, and that brought a tear to her eye, but she hid it well. Once breakfast was over and Nellie and Jake were fed, they spent the rest of the day unloading the truck, and muscling the huge safes on dollies to the freight elevator to put them in the basement with the rest of the armory.

Darcy was incredulous about all the guns and ammo, and asked Gene. “Gene, what do you need all those guns and ammo for?”

“Once the economy collapses, we won’t be able to buy guns or ammo again, possibly forever. I’m glad he had these flintlock rifles, bullet molds, and pyrodex. It’s much easier to make black powder and cast your own bullets than to reload cartridges.” Darcy looked at him like he had just announced he was from Mars, so he continued.

“Once the manufacturers that make bullets, primers, brass, and modern smokeless powder shut down and the factories are destroyed for whatever reason, it will take decades if ever to replace them. Black powder is messy, but it’s easier to make the

components. I need to locate a sporting goods store and buy a large quantity of archery, camping and hiking stuff for storage. Once these kids grow up, they'll need clothes too, which means we need to buy sewing machines and stuff. Looks like the 4 of us are going shopping in Reno."

Nick and Darcy took their kids home that afternoon, they needed clean clothes, and slept better in their own beds. While Lonnie nursed her babies, Gene started dinner, and checked the Internet for a listing of various shops he wanted to try. He was disappointed when the County told him they had already hit Wal-Mart. In an ironic twist of events, their corporate buyer came back from China days after the initial Patient Zero, but she was infected with a much more virulent strain of H5N1 which had a 100% fatality rate. The virus spread through Wal-Mart corporate like wildfire, and a week later, everyone except some part-time clerks were dead. The state of NV declared their property abandoned, and stored the rest of their goods in warehouses for "emergency relief use". Gene wasn't worried, Reno was too big to have all the mom and pop stores run out by Wal-Mart and quickly located several smaller sewing and fabric stores, and checked them against their list. They were both listed on the abandoned property list, so they would wear their Reservist badges tomorrow, clean out both stores and donate half of it to Washoe County.

He located a couple of sporting goods stores nearby that were on the list, and added them to their scavenging run tomorrow. He had a bright idea, and checked if any health-food stores were on the list, and several were not only on the list, but close to the other stores. He called Lonnie, and asked her to make a list of the herbal preparations she could use. "Silly, if we're scavenging take them all, and sort them later!" Gene checked the Yellow pages, and made a list of all the places they were going to visit tomorrow. It might take them several days to work through the list, so they decided to go to the sewing/fabric/notions shops tomorrow, and leave the rest for later that week. Lonnie and Darcy were in 7th Heaven at the fabric stores, and Gene had to remind them they were there to scavenge, not window shop, and they started loading everything they were remotely interested in on dollies and hauled them to the truck. They took all the sewing machines, notions, fabric, patterns, and even fixtures. By the time they hit 3 sewing stores, and several Herbal/Health food stores, they were full, so they stopped at the Convention Center, unloaded half the stuff, and drove up the hill.

The next day Gene and Nick went to all the Sporting Goods stores on the list, and cleaned them out. He found dozens of compound bows still in their box, dozens of boxes of arrows, a case full of broadheads, strings, and other accessories, camping gear, tools, stoves, water purifiers, etc. and they finally loaded the truck full and headed to the Convention Center. Someone noticed that they weren't scavenging food, but ways to collect food later, and essential tools that has to be manufactured. Gene knew it couldn't last forever, and realized that the freelance scavengers would now start scavenging useful stuff instead of rummaging through food stores for salvageable food. They wanted to make 1 more trip tomorrow to a feed and seed store to get some more non-hybrid seeds. They didn't have the room for horses and the ability to feed them now, so they'd trade for them later.

The next day, they hit the feed and seed store, and seeing they had room, located a hardware store nearby on the list and cleaned it out of everything they could get to fit. This time they haggled a little with the operator of the Convention Center, who wanted to take the good stuff and leave them the junk. The fact that they were armed deputies, and obviously not afraid to use lethal force convinced the operator to compromise, and divide items equally as possible. If there were two of an item, the County got 1 of them. It took longer than planned, but Gene made sure they got their fair share of the salvaged stuff. He got an updated list from the operator, and realized there wasn't that much abandoned property that was really worth scavenging. They wouldn't need 10,000 snowboards or skis anytime soon. The previous sporting goods store gave them enough snow gear to cover their winter needs. He thought about snowmobiles, but there were no snowmobile dealerships listed among the abandoned properties, and judging by the lack of trucks on the dealers lots, they had probably already been looted like the shopping centers had over two years ago when the balloon first went up.

When they came home that evening, Lonnie announced they were done scavenging, there wasn't much room left in any of the 4 houses to store any more stuff, and they had managed to whittle down the account balance to around half a million dollars. Lonnie was planning on using their remaining FRN's to purchase as much diesel and propane as possible, and get their gasoline tank topped off since they had been driving Lonnie's jeep again. She called the distributor and nearly fainted at the price. Diesel was over \$5 per gallon, and Gasoline was pushing \$6 per gallon when they could get it. Propane was selling for \$5 per gallon as well. She figured out how much fuel it would take to fill all their tanks

on the property, and placed the order while she could get it. She ordered just under 16 thousand gallons of diesel, 2 thousand gallons of gasoline, and 17 thousand gallons of propane. Including delivery, she had just ordered \$180 thousand worth of fuel! She hoped it would last, but knew that it would only last a couple of years at best. She wondered if they could get some more wind turbines or anything like that and store it for later. She asked Gene, who checked the internet. He located Wholesale Solar in Mount Shasta CA, and they claimed they could ship as many Air-X 12vdc units as they wanted at \$500 each. Gene called Lonnie, wrote the figure "\$500 each plus shipping" on a pad, and Lonnie said to order 100 of them.

"What kind of pricing could you give me if I ordered 100 of them, plus 30-foot tower kits, and shipping from Mt. Shasta to Sierra County."

"Can you hold 1 minute please?"

Several minutes later the Sales Manager was on the phone "I understand you want to order 100 units, correct."

"Yes sir, that's what I said."

"The credit card company can't handle that sized order."

"How about a cashier's check or wire transfer."

"A wire transfer would be preferable."

"I'll authorize the Bank of America in Reno to wire transfer the funds when I receive an invoice showing the merchandise was picked up for shipment. I want it shipped FOB Sierra County."

"Ok, I can ship that via common carrier FOB Sierra County. The order is for 100 12volt dc Air-X units plus 100 30-foot tower kits. Cost on those kits is \$250 each, so I'll sell you them for \$300 each. Total order is \$80,000 plus shipping and tax. The total amount due is \$88,613.52"

I'll need your banking information to complete the wire transfer, better yet, I'll

give you the number of the local branch President, and he can make arrangements. I'll call him with the authorization when I see an invoice indicating the order has been shipped."

"Nice doing business with you."

Gene turned to Lonnie and said "We just spent almost \$100 thousand on wind generators. What about the batteries and stuff for the inverter setup?"

"The batteries have a limited shelf life, but maybe we should check and see if any of our batteries are getting old, and order them from them before the order ships so we can have them shipped together since batteries cost so much to ship."

Gene ran down to the basement, and checked the dates on his batteries, and half the bank was due to be replaced in 2 years, and the remainder in 5. He got the model numbers off the batteries, and called Wholesale Solar and spoke to the Sales Manager, who gave him a good price on the batteries, and a deal on the shipping, since their order would just about take up a whole piggyback trailer between the weight and volume. Gene got the revised amount, and thanked him. Two days later, Gene got an e-mail with the invoice number, amount, and a shipping date of the next day, so he called John at B of A, and authorized the wire transfer, and asked John to e-mail him a receipt for the shipper to show it had been paid for. 1 week later, a big tractor-trailer showed up at Larry's place, and they were nice enough to help them load it onto Gene's 40-foot cube van instead of dropping and running. Gene gave them a \$100 bill each for their trouble, and drove back home. They stored the turbines, and it took almost 3 days to get the battery bank taken down, cleaned out, and put back together. Gene and Lonnie moved in with Nick and Sally's family while they were rebuilding their battery bank. Finally it was in, and Gene immediately noticed that the inverters weren't running as hard, and the backup inverters shut down more frequently.

The next morning, Larry called Gene and asked him and Nick to come to his house. They met Larry and sat down in the living room. "I got a call saying that Psychokitty has something we might be interested in. Problem is Gene's the only one who can afford it, and you already have that Hummer with the Ma Deuce."

"If he's got something, I'm interested."

Larry called PsychoKitty's answering machine, left his cellular number, and he called back 10 minutes later.

"Gentlemen, I see your curiosity got the better of you. If you can afford half a million in gold, I have one recently rebuilt USMC LAV-25 with 30,000 rounds of M791 and M792 25mm ammo, 4,000 rounds for the 7.62 coax, and as the piez de resistance, a MK-19 in place of the Commander's M60 with 4000 rounds of linked HE and HEDP 40mm ammo. This is a one-time take-it or leave it offer. It's hotter than a pistol, but I have several buyers interested."

Larry saw Gene nodding his head vigorously so he said "We'll take it as long as it's in good shape and it's got at least that much ammo on-board."

"I might be able to scrounge up some more 25mm and 40mm."

"When and where?"

"Tomorrow, usual time and place."

The phone clicked dead, and Larry looked at Gene

"Half a million in gold? Are you nuts?"

"We've been busy converting our FRN's to gold and silver, and we've spent most of our FRN's buying stuff instead of gold."

"OK, be careful, if the Military knew you had this hardware, you'd be lucky to wind up in Leavenworth for the rest of your life."

"They can only hang me once."

"You've got a point there, I've already given you guys enough stuff for 50 years at Leavenworth."

"I hope you left yourself enough stuff?"

"We've got more than enough thanks to PsychoKitty. He's always come through."

I think he had a supply sergeant in his hip pocket the way he get hold of stuff.”

Gene called Lonnie, who said “OK, if you think we need it.” Then he called John at the bank, and instructed him to convert their remaining cash into gold, and call him. He needed to pick it up tomorrow morning.

“We just posted your monthly interest payment, you’ve got \$550 thousand and change in the bank.”

“Convert the \$550 thousand to gold, and keep the balance, then close the account.”

“You sure Gene?”

“Nothing sure but death and taxes. If we live through the next couple of years, I might re-open the account if the bank’s still there.”

“Ok, make sure when you come over tomorrow to clean out your safe deposit too.”

They drove home, and John called him first thing in the morning. “Gold’s here.”

“Be right there.”

Gene called Nick and asked him if he’d mind riding shotgun for a quick trip to Reno, and to make sure he was wearing his LEO gear and his vest. Gene grabbed both MP-5SD’s out of the safe, a bag of 20 loaded magazines, kissed Lonnie and the kids, picked up his loaded M4/M203, put on his kevlar vest, LBV, and headed out the door. Nick met him out front, and said “Let’s go.” 2 hours later, they arrived in Reno, picked up the gold and the contents of Gene’s safe deposit box. They didn’t make it two miles when they turned a corner and two bullets hit the windshield, and Gene could see an improvised roadblock ahead. They had the top off the Jeep, so Nick leaned out the open passenger side, fired a 40mm grenade at the roadblock, destroying it, and hopefully killing anyone near it. They drove carefully around it, and spotted several bodies laying on the ground either dead or severely wounded on the far side, but didn’t stop to check them out when Gene remembered what he was carrying. He didn’t bother to call it in either since they were just nominally reserve deputies. Gene chose a different route to Interstate 80

West, and made it with no further incidents. When he got home, Lonnie gave him hell for the bullet holes in her windshield. He put it in perspective when he said “better the windshield than me.” She hugged the stuffing out of him and started crying.

“Relax Lonnie, what I’m buying this afternoon is invulnerable to anything but an Abrams Main Battle Tank, or a heavy anti-tank missile. This would constitute the Ultimate Bug Out Vehicle.”

Gene spent the rest of the day with Lonnie and his kids. He was amazed at how big Jake and Nellie were getting, and how often they needed to be fed.

“So how soon are these chow hounds going to be weaned?”

“Soon hopefully. I’ll know when my milk starts drying up, or when they develop teeth, whichever occurs first.”

“Ouch!”

“Ouch is right, I’m sore and they don’t have teeth yet!”

“Nick and I need to make a pickup this evening. I should be home by 8 o’clock.”

Nick and Gene got in the Jeep, and made it to Larry’s place by 1700, and they drove to the biker bar, got there by 1745 and waited. Gene hadn’t seen an LAV-25 up close and personal for years, and when it drove down the street, he was glad he had already gone to the bathroom. The sight of that big gun was definitely intense! The engine shut down, then PsychoKitty and his henchmen climbed out the rear hatch. Larry got out of the Jeep with the gold, and handed it to PsychoKitty, who counted it, handed his henchmen 5 coins each, then they went inside the bar, leaving PsychoKitty alone with the 3 of them.

“Gentlemen, I think this might be yours. She needs a good home. Who’s driving her anyway?”

Nick nudged Gene forward, and he said “I guess I am.”

“Well son, you’re in for a crash course in driving the LAV, I hope you’re a quick study because Big Bertha here can do a lot of damage.” They crawled back inside the LAV, and PK showed him where the driver’s seat was, and how to operate the controls. After a few minutes of experimenting with the controls, PK told him to take it around the block, just make sure not to flatten any motorcycles. Gene blanched at the thought of what a bunch of PO’d 1%ers would do to him! He paid attention to his driving, and when they parked the LAV, PsychoKitty wasn’t as gruff as he usually was. “Nice job Kid. Let’s show you the weapons and ammo, then I need to go get a beer and see a man about a horse.”

He opened the hatch, and Larry was relieved to see that Gene was not only alive, but still in one piece. PsychoKitty showed them the crates of ammo, handed them a box of FM’s and said “Nice doing business with you.” and walked into the same biker bar as his henchmen did half an hour ago.

Gene decided that they needed to get the LAV under cover quickly, and told Larry to take the Jeep back to his house, they’d park the LAV in Nick’s garage. He told Nick to man the Commander’s position, but don’t let it get to his head, he just wanted him to man the MK-19, which had a box of linked 40mm HE grenades attached and Nick knew how to fire the MK-19 thanks to his previous military training. They got the huge LAV-25 home without incident, and parked it in Nick’s garage, where it barely fit. They took a tape measure to it and found out why - it was over 22 feet long, 6 and a half feet tall, and over 9 feet wide. He was grateful he had used 8 inches of 3500psi reinforced concrete for the freeze/thaw properties, since he remembered something about the LAV-25 weighing over 35 thousand pounds. They inventoried the stuff in the back, and all the ammo was there, as well as 2 spare tires, and a box of manuals. Gene decided they needed to read the manuals as soon as possible, so they could load the main Bushmaster and the Coax in case they needed to use it to defend the compound. Gene was grateful that they were kind enough to mount the MK-19 and load a box of grenades so they had some self-defense capability on their way home. Gene thought about that, and realized they probably drove it from wherever they stashed the lowboy to the biker bar, and wanted the MK-19 loaded for their own use too.

Chapter 15

For the next 6 months, things continued to deteriorate in the US as prices continued to climb, unemployment reached double digits as businesses shut down for lack of customers, and Larry was hearing rumors of Chinese and European bankers plotting to seize US territory as payment for the US debt. Never mind most of that debt was incurred bailing Europe out after WWII, they still wanted their “Money”. It seems that bankers were even more short-sighted than Lawyers, and didn’t realize or care that foreclosing on the debt would be tantamount to an act of war, and the US would react violently. By now the UN was believing their own press after spending the last 20 years beating up on 3rd World nations, and the European Generals were feeling like Supermen again. GW has some how managed to hang on as President past his 8-year term limit by declaring a State of Emergency. Unknown to George, several European countries had already agreed to attack the US. England was now thoroughly neutered, and was told to stay out, or they’d get several nuclear bombs too. Still they valued our friendship enough to send a back-channel message to GW that the Europeans were about to attack, and he readied a plan long held for this very emergency.

He sent out a one-word command to his AF commander, and 12 hours later, every Stealth fighter and Stealth bomber we had in the inventory was airborne with as many nuclear bombs and cruise missiles as they could carry. GW believed in Situational Ethics, plus he never personally said that we wouldn’t use nukes first, so he did. The next morning, Brussels was hit by several 50KT bombs, taking out the European Generals who were planning the invasion of the US, as were the capitols of every European country involved. He used several nuclear deep-penetration “bunker buster” JDAMs to ensure the Chinese Government and Military were in no condition to launch anything our way, then he called the Russian Premiere, and highly suggested he not send any missiles our way, or we’d retaliate with the rest of our missiles and level Russia. He wisely agreed, since he didn’t have a dog in this fight, and was grateful we’d taken China out as a world power, since they were always a threat to the Russians.

One thing GW didn’t count on, or didn’t care about, was that the World Economy was so interdependent that when he nuked Europe and China, world trade stopped practically overnight, the banking industry collapsed, and businesses that sold the bulk of their products overseas filed bankruptcy and went out of business within

90 days of the first strike. Once the “big manufacturers” went under, the rest of the economy followed in a cascade of economic dominos as buyers and seller either had nothing to buy or sell. The UN did what they did best, and threw a snit fit, and debated what to do. GW finally had enough, and ordered them declared Persona Non Grata and deported.

Once Gene heard about what GW had done, and the worldwide repercussions, they went on a spending/scavenging spree, and snapped up anything they could, for any price that they absolutely had to have, topped off their fuel tanks and bought more. They had enough guns and ammo to fight WWII, but Larry warned them that the Federal Government would soon start seizing food and supplies that they were “hoarding” and confiscating weapons like they did in the big cities of California, Washington, and the East Coast. Now that the big coastal cities were thoroughly pacified and the survivors of the deadly plague housed in Government housing surrounded by barbed wire fences topped with razor wire supposedly to keep criminals out, yet several people inside noticed the guardhouses faced in, not out, and the lights flooded the compound to prevent an escape. It seemed that several Survivalists’ worst nightmare was becoming a reality and the United States had finally become a Police State with the Federal Government in charge.

6 months after the big collapse, Larry got orders to open his armory for a contingent of “Peacekeepers” from Sacramento who were going to occupy the critical Donner Pass to control access to and from California along the now Federalized Interstate 80. Larry told Gene not to be so surprised, when they built the Interstates with Federal money, it was with the understanding that they would be used for Military or Emergency traffic and Federalized in time of war. They conveniently forgot to stipulate if that meant whether we started it or not, so GW confiscated all the Interstates, and set up roadblocks to prohibit their use by civilians. He was slowly losing touch with reality, and saw himself as the Savior of the US, instead of a power-mad Nero who was destroying the country. Larry and Gene decided the best defense would be a good offense, and to use their military gear to stop the “Peacekeepers” in their tracks, seize all their heavy weapons, and prepare for the next attack. Their only other alternative was to surrender to the Federal Authorities. From what Larry had heard through the grapevine, that wasn’t an option, since the FEMA people in charge of the camps were abusing the occupants worse than the Nazis did in their extermination camps. They confiscated most of the food that did make it there, and fed the “inmates” a

starvation diet of 1 MRE per day, and 1 liter of water, even though they were getting shipped more than enough food to feed everyone, and sold the excess food on the black market. Several guards were raping inmates and beating any who showed any resistance to their abuse. Larry was so mad when he heard about the camps that he wanted to take some firepower and level several of them and free the inmates, except they didn't have enough food to feed them either, and they'd eventually starve if they were freed. Gene and Larry decided they'd rather die fighting than join them in captivity. Lonnie and Maria agreed with their husbands, but Darcy was still convinced that things would return to Normal sometime soon, and couldn't see fighting against the Federal Government. Nick sat her down, and explained to his very pregnant wife in very graphic terms exactly what would happen to her if the JBT's got hold of her in her condition. After she spent several hours bawling her eyes out, Nick could see his wife had found her backbone again, and was willing to do whatever it took to survive and protect her unborn child from anyone who would try to hurt them. Larry contacted the rest of his deputies, and they planned an ambush that should stop the JBT's cold, and not wreck most of their equipment. They planned to let the JBT's right up to where they thought the supplies were stored, get them out of their vehicles, and shoot them all, then seize their vehicles. Larry agreed to the plan, even though his life was in jeopardy as the guy out in the open.

2 weeks later, the Peacekeepers drove right up to the expected site, and were acting like they were out for a Sunday drive. The only person in their team that maintained an over watch was an older grizzled Sergeant who refused to come down from his Ma Deuce mounted on his Hummer. Unfortunately, his stubborn insistence on obeying his orders meant his death when Gene shot him through the forehead. The rest of the team popped out of spider holes, aimed their weapons at the rest of the peacekeepers, and Larry ordered them to lay on the ground with their arms out to the side. Any other action would result in their death. The LT who was leading the troops was a NG Reservist, and not as gung-ho as his Sergeant was, and told his troops to lay down. Once they were secured and searched, they were treated much better than they expected. Gene talked to the LT, and learned they were a transport company, and not involved in the FEMA operations. All they did was transport gear and supplies from 1 location to another.

He told Gene an interesting story that made him decide to talk to Larry, and if he

agreed, he'd not only spare their lives, but might even have some housing and food supplies to set them up with if they agreed to help defend the community.

Gene and Larry talked in private, and came to the agreement that it was worth taking the chance, since their next stop was the depot at Barstow where they were supposed to pick up some heavy armor on low-boys, several 18-wheelers full of ammo for them and transport it to the headquarters in San Francisco. They were coming back through Interstate 80 in a week. When Larry found out how many tanks, Bradley's, Hummers, and other stuff they were picking up, he realized it was way more than worth the risk. With the hardware they were picking up, they could stand off an entire Company of NG/Reservist troops indefinitely. Gene, Larry and Neil met in Larry's office, and they laid their plan before Neil as a take-it or leave it proposition. Neil told them after what he had seen, he was ready to defect anyway, and by the looks of things, this would be the best place to do it. They called the rest of Neil's team into the conference room, and they all agreed to pick up the load in Barstow, drive it back here, and defect.

Once they left for Barstow, Larry told Gene to stay on High Alert until he called him, and stay at home. If this was a trap, he would make sure that they came back to him, since they didn't know where Gene lived. The next week was the longest week of Gene's life. He only got 4 hours of sleep per night, and spent most of the day wearing his Combat gear and ready to go at a moment's notice. Finally Larry called, and said that Neil called, and was just cresting the Donner Pass, and would be there in an hour. Once Larry hung up, Gene called Nick and Hector and told them "Red Alert" and they got the Hummer and the LAV-25 loaded and manned. Darcy was too pregnant to move, so she was left babysitting the kids, and Lonnie and Maria went with their husbands. Gene was going to drive the LAV since he had the most experience, Nick would man the Mark-19, and Lonnie would act as the gunner for the Bushmaster and the co-ax. They sat in their garage waiting for Larry to call "all Clear" or for an hour and a half to pass without contact, in which case they'd execute their fail-safe and head for Larry's place to find out what had happened. Neil's transport company didn't know that Gene had an LAV or the Hummer, they never saw it - all they saw was a bunch of dismounted infantry with assault rifles and subguns. Gene was hoping if they double-crossed them, they wouldn't be expecting that much firepower, and they'd get sweet revenge for their duplicity. Right when Gene got done worrying about a double-cross, he heard Larry's voice on the radio with the all-clear code "Oklahoma Rising" and they

drove over to Larry's place.

Half an hour later, Neil's transport company was glad they didn't double-cross them when they saw the LAV-25 and the Hummer driving up the road with the bushmaster swiveling back and forth looking for trouble. Hector and Maria stayed with the Hummer with Hector behind the gun since he spoke better English while Gene, Nick and Lonnie climbed out of the back hatch of the LAV and introduced themselves.

"Man am I glad you guys are on our side. When I saw that huge Marine LAV, I thought for a second someone at Barstow ratted us out, and they came back to get their stuff, then I noticed Larry smiling, and realized you were with them."

They sat down in Larry's office to review the shipping manifest, and Gene nearly fainted there was so much firepower there.

4 M1A2SEP

336 120mm rounds (42 rounds/tank basic load, plus 1 reload)

16K rounds 12.5mm combat load linked (basic plus 1 reload/tank)

50K rounds 7.62mm linked (basic plus 1 reload/tank)

4 M3A3 CFV

15K 25mm rounds (900/tank basic load, plus 3 reloads/tank)

72K 7.62mm linked rounds (4400/tank basic load, plus 3 reloads/tank)

48 TOW missiles (basic load plus 1 reload/tank)

4 LAV-25

6800 25mm rounds (420/LAV basic load plus 3 reloads/LAV)

22K 7.62mm linked rounds (660/LAV basic load plus 3 reloads/LAV)

1 M270A1 MLRS

4 12-rocket M26 rocket pods (1basic load plus 3 reloads)

1 LAV-AD

4K 25mm rounds (990 rounds basic load plus 3 reloads)

64 Stinger Missiles (16 Missiles basic load plus 3 reloads)

4 HMMWV, 2 TOW and 2 MK-19

24 TOW Missiles

480 M430 40mm HEDP rounds (2x 48rd basic plus 4 reloads/HMMWV)

Larry asked Neil if anyone in his command was competent to drive, shoot, or command the Abrams Main Battle Tank. Neil smiled and said “all of my guys were from Armored Divisions in Desert Storm. Thanks to Budget cuts the California National Guard is way short of Armored divisions, so if we wanted a job in the National Guard, we had to become Transport troops. None of us was very happy riding around in unarmored trucks delivering stuff, so we’d love to get back into an armored vehicle.”

“You do realize that you’re likely to be up against other CNG units?”

“They’re under the control of FEMA, and if they’re following unlawful orders to attack, capture, and imprison US Citizens whose only crime is to want to be left alone, they’re in violation of their oath of office, and it is my duty as an officer to stop them by any means necessary. Besides, we might get them to surrender and join us once we tell them what FEMA is up to.”

“Don’t count on it Neil. I turned down several applicants for Deputies who were more than willing to follow any order, lawful or not. It seems the powers that be have done a better job than we thought indoctrinating this generation into blindly following orders. We might have to shoot a bunch of them anyway.”

“Oh well, their choice. Let’s get your people trained up. My guess is Director Simmons won’t wait long before he send an armored company back up our route to look for us. Odds they’ll have a Kiowa Warrior acting as a scout backed up by 4 Apaches. The LAV-AD can take the Kiowa on easily, but the Apache is a hard target. We might need some handheld Stingers to get them by shooting from unpredictable directions so they don’t see the missile launch, or they’re looking the other way.”

“How are they going to see the choppers?”

“They included some towed Air Defense Radar units that can detect a helicopter within 10 kilometers, or a fast-mover within 20. It’s based on the AN/UPS-3

Tactical Defense Alert Radar and is mounted on a trailer behind the Hummer, it only takes seconds to set up once they're stopped, and the radio can alert the LAV-AD and any other Air Defense systems in the area via radio."

"How about their tanks and stuff?"

"If we plan this right, we can dig revetments so the Abrams is hull down with nothing but it's turret exposed, or we might catch the Abrams still on their lowboys, in which case the TOW armed Hummers and Bradleys can take them out.

Gene, Larry, Neil, and Nick searched the local topo maps for an ideal ambush spot. Some place with an overlooking view of Interstate 80, hopefully where 80 runs through a pass so they can't escape, and woody enough to hide the force from casual detection. They located several sites, and drove over to check them out. 1 was too obvious, and was immediately rejected, and the other one was much better suited. They immediately got to digging tank revetments with their backhoes, and arranging camouflage nets and other tricks to cover the outline of the Tanks, Bradleys, Hummers, and LAV's. Stinger crews protected both sides of the road from air attack, and they set up the air defense radar in a spot where it would have the best view of the surrounding territory. 2 weeks later, the radar picked up an aerial slow-moving contact, and Neil knew it was the scouting Kiowa Warrior, out ahead of the convoy to make sure no one like them was planning on ambushing them. When the Kiowa was well within Stinger range, Neil flipped the radio to GUARD and transmitted. "California National Guard Warrior 2,000 feet heading east at 50 knots up Interstate 80. You are targeted. This is your first, last and only warning. Your presence is not needed, and the forces following you are obeying an illegal order by the local FEMA rep to confiscate food and weapons from law-abiding citizens. You have a choice. Land and surrender, or turn around and Return to Base. If you proceed further you will be shot down without warning."

"Whoever you are, how did you get on a Military frequency, clear the frequency."

"Listen up you idiots. We're on this frequency because we're Military. Unless you want to be blown out of the sky, stop where you are, and either land and surrender, or return to base. If any further military convoys come down this road with hostile intent, they will be destroyed out of hand."

Neil shook his head, the radar operator said the Kiowa was still coming, and had increased his speed. He called the LAV-AD and gave a 1 word command "Fire". Seconds later, a Stinger streaked up and shot the Kiowa out of the sky. No sooner had the chopper hit the ground, then the radar operator detected 4 Apache helicopters charging into the area as fast as they could. Their courage was admirable, but they were doomed. As soon as they were within Stinger range, the LAV-AD fired off the rest of it's Stingers, and several Stinger crews added their missiles to the pack of missiles flying at the helicopters. They couldn't avoid all of them, and 3 Apaches were hit and crashed, and the 4th managed to limp away to the west out of range. Larry and Neil conferred, and they agreed that things weren't looking too good, it seemed that whoever was running this show was either very gung-ho, very stupid, or both. Several hours later, the convoy came up I-80 with the Abrams still on their lowboys, escorted by armed and armored Hummers. Again Neil tried to reason with the CO on Guard, but he wasn't listening, and told Neil to surrender.

"No sir, you are no longer my commander. I took an oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States, not the deranged rantings of a lunatic megalomaniac Dictator. FEMA has no legal authority to confiscate food, supplies and weapons from law abiding citizens. I'm giving you 1 last chance to stand down and either retreat or surrender before your force is completely destroyed. If you noticed, we had NO problem destroying your air support. If you don't stop in the next mile, your command will be destroyed."

Neil waited as long as he could, then when they were within TOW range, he ordered his TOW equipped Bradleys and Hummers to shoot. They blew up every Abrams tank on their lowboys, then ceased fire.

"Commander, you are without your armor. My next volley will kill all the soldiers in your command. Don't make me kill American Soldiers. Stop now and save your command."

Suddenly brake smoke poured off the tires of the front Hummer, and the Convoy came to an abrupt stop. Seconds later, the passenger door opened, and a body fell to the pavement, then Neil's radio came alive on Guard "For God's sake don't shoot, I just shot the idiot commander. We don't want to attack anyone."

“You can either surrender, or return to base. We could use some more patriots, and have enough food, supplies and housing to put you up somewhere.”

“If it’s all the same to you, I’m going to return to base and shoot my CO - that SOB told us we were fighting against insurrectionists. I heard the whole conversation over the radio, and my Colonel’s insistence that we attack even after you destroyed our tanks. Thanks for not taking out the Hummers with your first volley.”

“I was a California National Guardsman too, and I couldn’t shoot Americans if I didn’t have to. If you want to join us, just approach within range of your radio, and call on Guard. My name’s Neil.”

“Thanks Neil, I’m Eric. Hopefully you’ll hear from me in a week or so. I’m going to try and get the rest of the 185th to join us. We got pulled out of Los Alamitos to defend the fat cats in Sacramento. They thought a bunch of tanks would protect them, but they died from the virus just like everyone else. It was horrible. Whenever we were outside, we had to wear our gas masks, and ate in our barracks at least 6 feet away from everyone else. Anyone who showed any signs of illness were confined to the sickbay, where they either died, or were returned to duty after 2 weeks. There wasn’t a damn thing the doctors and nurses could do for them. Someone mentioned something about Elderberries, and they spent weeks looking for them, only to discover they were out of season, and only ripe berries worked, and all the other parts of the plant were toxic. Several men died from eating various parts of the plants until my CO put the whole area off limits. I got sick, but somehow I survived. I’m not sure I wanted to after a couple of days. I got a letter from my Dad 2 weeks after that, my whole family had died in Long Beach, and I was the only member of my family that lived. He was writing with his last strength to let me know, to keep my faith in God, and he’d get me through this.”

“Ok Eric, I hope I hear from you soon. Sorry if I killed anyone in your command, but we had to stop them from attacking us.”

“Don’t worry, I checked, and the only people who died were a couple of Contractors who were hired to drive the trucks. My tankers were all in the ballistic Hummers where they were safe. We learned in Iraq not to let anyone ride in an Abrams that is riding on a low-boy, they’re a big fat road-bound target. I’ve got to

get back to my command and take care of a few things. Take care and God Bless.”

“You too Eric.”

As soon as they called “All Clear” Larry told Nick he needed to get home ASAP, Darcy was having her baby, and had been in labor for 4 hours. Gene grabbed Nick, jumped in their Hummer, and beat several speed records getting back. Nick peeled off his LBV and kevlar vest as he walked into Gene’s house, where Lonnie was acting as the midwife. As they came into the bedroom, Darcy saw her husband and yelled “GET OUT OF HERE YOU B@STARD! THIS IS ALL YOUR FAULT. SINCE YOU COULDN’T KEEP YOUR PAWS OFF ME, I’M GOING THROUGH H#LL! GET THE H#LL OUT OF HERE YOU B@STARD!”

Seeing that Nick was about to return fire, Gene grabbed him and hauled him back into the living room. “She’s not in her right mind Nick, don’t say something you’ll regret later.”

“Gene, you don’t understand, Darcy never wanted kids, and every time she got pregnant, she turned into Linda Blair in the delivery room, even with an Epidural. It’s my fault, she ran out of birth control pills, but I loved her, and wanted to make love to her. It’s been downhill since we had Mike. She didn’t want to have sex after that unless I got a vasectomy, and I’m Catholic, and knew the church was against it, so we compromised on birth control pills, and she was very careful when we had sex. Eventually it got less and less frequent, and right before the Avian Flu thing happened, I was ready to divorce her and find someone else. After that, I knew I had to stay with her if she were to have a chance to survive. Now with all these single men, maybe she can find someone else. I’m tired of her BS.”

“Nick, divorce is never the solution. Besides you have Mike and Jill to look after.”

“We already discussed this, I’d keep the kids, and she’d get her freedom back. Now with a newborn, she’s stuck again.”

“Nick, I’m going to stay with you and pray. Hopefully some good will come of this.”

“Thanks for staying with me buddy, I could really use the company right now.”

2 hours later, Darcy screamed, and then there was silence. 30 seconds later, Lonnie yelled “Gene, Nick get in here now, she’s hemorrhaging, and I can’t stop it.”

Both Gene and Nick had been through Combat Lifesaver, but they weren’t prepared for an emergency like this - gunshot wounds they could handle. A mother bleeding to death was beyond them. Suddenly Gene yelled. “Nick, try the femoral artery!”

Nick moved Lonnie gently aside, placed his hand over the junction of his wife’s pelvis and thigh, located the femoral artery, and pressed down. Still he could see blood coming out of her birth canal. Gene had another idea, and placed his hand right over her abdomen right over her uterus, and pressed down to her spine. Still Darcy’s blood pressure continued to fall. 5 minutes later, Lonnie checked Darcy’s pulse, and shook her head, then gently pried Gene’s hands off Darcy, then he went over to Nick and said “It’s over Buddy, I’m sorry, we couldn’t save her.”

Nick looked to Lonnie and said “Where’s my Baby?”

“He was stillborn Nick, the cord was tightly wrapped around his neck, and he was dead before she crowned.”

Nick wept, and Gene helped him out of the bedroom into the living room, he set Nick on the couch, and knelt next to him, praying that God would be merciful to his friend, and give him the strength to get through the next couple of days. Suddenly he knew what he had to do, and only saw the base chaplain do it once after a mass-casualty accident killed 4 soldiers. He stood up in front of his sobbing friend, placed both his hands on his shoulders and prayed aloud.

“Father, we come to you in this hour of need, not understanding why you took Darcy and her little boy to be with you. Right now please give us the Faith to accept your will, the Strength to believe all this has a purpose, and the Grace to deal with the future. Father I ask a special blessing on my friend and his family. Take care of them, and hold them in your hand. I ask this in your Son’s Blessed Name. Amen.”

Chapter 16

Gene spent the rest of the day with Nick, and finally he said he wanted to see his kids, and try to explain things to them. Gene offered to go with him, but Nick said he wanted to do it himself, and just spend time with Mike and Jill. He walked over to Hector and Maria's house, and carried his sleeping kids back to his house. The house felt so empty without Darcy, and he barely made it inside the house, put the kids to bed, and fell face down on the bed before he cried himself to sleep.

Later that evening, he thought he was dreaming when he saw Darcy and his son, and they were smiling. He didn't know why, but he knew that Darcy was in heaven with Jesus, and she didn't blame him for what happened. He whispered "goodbye" to both of them, and heard Darcy say "goodbye my love" in his head in reply, then he fell into a deep sleep. The next morning, he woke up, took care of Mike and Jill, made them breakfast, then sat them down in the playroom and tried to explain to them that they couldn't see their Mommy again, but she was happy in Heaven with Jesus. Jill said "I want to be with Mommy and Jesus!"

"I know Jill, I miss them too. We'll see them again, but it will be a real long time." Nick wrapped his children in his arms and held them while they cried some more. That afternoon, he called Gene and suggested they bury Darcy and their baby together. Gene said he'd already built the casket and dug the grave, and were ready to bury them whenever they were ready. Nick brought Mike and Jill over to say goodbye to their Mom. All Jill understood was her mom was cold, and her eyes were closed, and she couldn't hear her. Finally Gene sealed the casket, and the 4 of them carried her body, and the body of her baby boy to the grave using ropes to carry the casket. They gently laid her into the hole, and Nick knelt next to the grave and said "See you later Darcy, don't worry, I'll take good care of Mike and Jill for you." They read several verses from the Bible, and when they were finished, Hector and Maria said the Lord's Prayer in Spanish, while Gene, Lonnie and Nick followed along in English. After that, Hector made the sign of the cross, and blessed the grave, then they buried the casket using a shovel. Once the grave was filled in, Hector added a wooden cross with Darcy's name, date of birth and death. Nick picked up his kids and carried them back home, then fixed them dinner and went to bed.

While they buried Darcy, the third wave of Avian Flu started in the United States

when a Canadian was visiting family in Canada, then returned to Washington State the next week to resume his job as an Engineer. His family somehow came in contact with someone who was infected, and gave it to him, and he spread it throughout his office. Later that week, the radio was reporting new flu deaths, and this time the Federal Government swung into immediate action, and quarantined Seattle and Tacoma. Still it was too late since H5N1 was contagious 1 week before you showed symptoms, and had already escaped the quarantine area. All over the US, City/County and State governments quickly shut down schools and ordered everyone into 2 week isolation so the bug couldn't spread. Between the higher number of people who had survived the first two waves with immunity, and the quick isolation and quarantine procedures, the third wave wasn't as deadly, but it gave the FEMA reps something else to worry about, and forgot invading Sierra County for now.

When Eric got back to his barracks, he did exactly what he said he was going to do, and shot the General who gave the orders to attack then he and his men killed several other members of the Headquarters Company. Next he called a private meeting of the officers in charge of the 2nd and 3rd Brigade, and convinced them to join him and his troops. That evening, they loaded all their combat gear, supplies, and everything at the base that wasn't nailed down, and headed East on I-80. When they got within radio range of Neil's team, Eric called on Guard, and said the 2nd and 3rd Brigade decided to come with them, as well as the remainder of the Aviation Brigade. Neil sat there stunned for a minute trying to think what they were going to do with all those people, when Larry punched him in the shoulder and said "Get the show on the road, we'll figure out what to do with them later."

"OK Eric, come on in, the welcome mat is out."

Neil called the security force, and told them to stand down, but maintain yellow alert. Later that afternoon, Neil and Eric met in person for the first time.

"Glad you could make it Eric. How did you manage to get both the 2nd and 3rd Armored Brigades and the Aviation Brigade to join you?"

"It was easy actually, several of their sergeants were detailed to the "refugee camps" at one time or another, and were thoroughly disgusted by what they saw, but kept their mouths shut, because they knew if they said anything, they could

wind up in a refugee camp or worse. After we shot the base CO and most of the senior officers at Headquarters Company, they decided that it was a good time to come clean to their CO's, and between the two of us, they realized that they had been given illegal orders, and decided to join you guys."

"I hope you guys brought plenty of fuel?"

"We drained the base fuel depot. If you looked at the back of our convoy, you should have seen all those fuellers and triple-tank fuel haulers. We need to find some place to store it all, and then we're good to go for a while."

"There's a fuel distributor in town that might have enough storage capacity to store it all, why not ask him?"

They drove over to the distributor who told them his fuel tanks were just about empty, and the remaining fuel belonged to Gene and Lonnie since they paid for it, but had no room to store it. Thinking quickly, Eric volunteered to store their fuel in one of his tanker trucks, which would hold it easily if they could rent the rest of his storage tanks for the duration of the emergency. He hadn't gotten any shipments for over a year, and wasn't holding his breath for any more soon, so when Eric offered him 5 ounces of gold, worth about \$10 thousand at that time to lease the tanks for a year, he readily agreed. They emptied the diesel and gasoline into a spare tanker, then filled his storage tanks with JP-8. They were still arranging hangar space for the 8 Chinooks they flew with them, and the rest of the choppers they brought with them. Leon, the CO of the Aviation Brigade wasn't too happy about Neil shooting down his Kiowa and 4 Apaches, but Neil talked to him, as did Eric, and they explained that Neil warned them before they were shot down, and they chose to push a bad situation instead of returning to base. Leon realized it was the Gung-ho Colonel running the show that ordered them to attack a prepared defender with unknown anti-air capabilities, and forgave Neil for shooting them down.

2 weeks after the remnants of the CA-ANG 40th Division (Mechanized) relocated to Sierra County, they were told to lock down and isolate for at least 2 weeks, the third wave of H5N1 had arrived in the US. While the US was locked down and in quarantine, General Yap of the 40th Group Army headed south to Beijing. He was headquartered in Jinzhou, and was in the field with his troops near the Siberian

border when the bombs fell, . He was cut off from headquarters, and EMP had disabled most of his vehicles. Eventually he got an older truck running, and ordered the driver to drive at his best speed toward PLA Headquarters. General Yap was one of the few field commanders who had access to the launch codes for China's nuclear weapons, and the closer he got to Beijing, the more obvious it became that whoever had attacked them had used a surgical strike with precision guided nuclear weapons, which meant the Americans had attacked in a first-strike scenario. He was out of the loop regarding the pending invasion of the US since they needed his troops to secure their Northern border, and also stay close to home to quell any disturbances in Beijing, so he thought that the US attack was unprovoked.

As soon as he located the launch control center, unburied the entrance and cleared the bodies away from the controls, he ordered the missiles prepared for immediate launch, then programmed the doomsday launch sequence. While he was waiting for the missiles to be fueled, he took the launch keys from the bodies of the senior operator and his second in command, and ordered his second in command to turn his key when he did once the missiles were ready. Seconds later, 2/3 of China's land-based missiles lifted off, and the remainder blew up in their silos, killing General Yap and everyone in the bunker when the damaged blast seals failed.

Meanwhile, the remaining Chinese nuclear missile sub, which had been doing it's utmost best to hide from the American attack subs, received orders to immediately surface and launch all their missiles at the pre-planned coordinates already loaded in their missiles. Even though he knew they would be killed shortly before or after they launched when every attack sub heard all the noise a missile launch evolution made, he had his orders, and ordered the submarine to the surface. Once on the surface, he and his weapons officer turned their keys and launched all their missiles, then dove and attempted to evade the American retaliation. 4 688I Los Angeles class submarines were in the Caribbean Sea hunting the Chinese missile sub, and as soon as he blew his tanks to surface, they charged his location at Flank speed to hopefully get there before he launched his missiles even though he was clearly inside Cuban territorial waters. They all launched Harpoons at the sub when it surfaced, but the sub's missiles beat the Harpoons by seconds, and were clean away when the Harpoons detonated over the Chinese sub's missile deck, flooding the missile compartment, and several forward compartments with seawater, accelerating the Chinese ship's plummet toward the bottom of the

Carribean Sea. Minutes later, the senior sonar operators on the 688i's heard the impact of the Chinese boomer on the sea floor. They would have cheered except the Chinese missiles were already on their way to their targets in the US.

As soon as the missiles in China started firing, Space Command detected the launch blooms, and started protocols they had practiced, but prayed every night they never had to do in real life. The shock of reality delayed them only for an instant, then training took over, and they immediately started notifying everyone on a long list. The missile launch from Cuba almost took them by surprise since they were busy watching the launches from China, but the automated hardware did its job, and notified the Senior Watch Commander that the sudden heat blooms in the Carribean were consistent with a multiple missile launch. As the missiles rose about the Carribean, they were detected on Radar, and the entire process went into Hyperdrive. GW was sitting at his desk in the Oval Office planning his next move when the Senior Agent in charge of his detail burst into the room, shouted "Marching Order" and escorted the President, First Lady, and any available Cabinet Members to Marine One, which was completing an emergency landing on the White House lawn. As soon as the President, first Lady, and the few cabinet members they could grab were aboard, the pilot used emergency power to take off, and flew as fast as the helicopter could to Andrews, where Air Force One was being prepped for immediate take off. They landed and deplaned, and right as they were boarding Air Force One, GW looked to the South, and was permanently blinded an instant before his body turned into ash and was atomized by the blast wave that hit an instant later.

Gene was talking to Larry when he heard the EAS tones over his radio. The sky was clear, so he realized instantly what was wrong, told Larry to get everyone under cover, they had maybe 10-12 minutes before San Francisco would get nuked, and a couple of hours or so after that before they would start getting fall-out. They were about 200 miles due East of San Francisco, assuming a 10-knot wind, they could start receiving fallout anywhere from 5-15 hours later. They agreed to get everyone they could under cover in the next two hours, and to tell everyone NOT to look to the west, or they might be blinded by the flash, even this far away. Larry called Eric, and they hustled to get everything and everyone under cover. Gene got Nick, Hector and Luis to get their families into their basements, and to seal the doors and windows, and close the valves on their vents.

They got their families in their basements first, brought down extra supplies, hooked up their radiation meters to measure radiation outside and inside their houses, plus a third lower-range meter to measure radiation inside the basement. Everyone put on their Nuke-Alerts and charged their dosimeters. While they were getting their families into the basement, Gene heard the remnants of the blast wave that took out San Francisco while he was sealing up their house. Right as their outside radiation meters started reading above background radiation, they were already into their shelters, and prepared to remain there for several weeks. As far away as they were, they weren't expecting much more than a couple hundred rads max. There were no significant bunkered targets, so the warheads should all be set to air burst, and would probably be in the neighborhood of 200KT each, and Gene's best guess would be 6 warheads would be aimed at and around San Francisco, with others striking targets in and around Northern California. He checked his radiation table, and the news was better than he hoped for. If the radiation peaked under 200 rads, they should be safe after a week or so to go out for a couple of hours each day if they slept in the shelter.

Two weeks later, when Gene told everyone it was OK to come out, he was glad to find out they had only lost a few people who couldn't find shelter, or chose poorly. Some people thought their basements were enough shelter, even though they had nothing more than their house and wood floor above them to absorb radiation. Larry had sent anyone he could locate that didn't have shelter to the bomb shelter under the County Administration Building with instructions to bring enough food and water to last two weeks, and to bring a sleeping bag, clothes, a cot or air mattress to sleep on, and some books or games. Two weeks later, they were grateful that they didn't get any more radiation than they had since the quarters were definitely cramped. Half of the occupants belonged to the California Army National Guard, and were instrumental in keeping everyone healthy and sane during the enforced confinement. Larry was very proud of Eric when he heard what he had done while they were in the shelter. He organized everyone so they had something to do, felt useful, and kept the conflict to a minimum. When Larry re-established contact with Reno, the Washoe County Sheriff had an interesting proposal for him. Seems the County had thousands of non-violent female prisoners in jail and in a low-security honor camp and they were getting tired of feeding and taking care of them. They were all single women, and were between 20 and 40 years old. He had met with the women, and told them if they were willing to settle down, get married and homestead properties in the Sierras, he'd

release them on probation. He told them that there were literally hundreds of California National Guard troops who were stuck there for the duration and probably looking for wives. Larry thought it was an excellent idea, and decided to talk to Eric and Neil, who said “this should be interesting!”

They drove to Reno the next day in a military convoy 20 miles long. They left the Abrams and Bradleys in the armory under the care of several older married sergeants who somehow managed to get their families moved to the Sierras between when they relocated and the Big Bang. Larry had authorized the Army to take over every habitable abandoned property, which dispersed Eric and Neil’s command over 30 square miles, but they had radios to keep in touch, and the maintenance troops lived close to the armory (the old high school). When they drove up to the main gate of the honor camp, they were greeted by thousands of women, some who looked like they’d lived a hard life, and others that were really pretty. Neil and Eric already explained to their troops that 1/3 of the women in the honor camp were in jail for prostitution charges, but had been given a clean bill of health by the camp doctor, and any that had a drug habit were thoroughly detoxified by not having access to any drugs for the last 6 months. The camp superintendent had put them all to work growing food, but they were running out of space, and when the Sheriff suggested hooking them up with the single National Guard troops from California, the Superintendent saw the light. The women were told their one chance to get out of the camp was to marry one of the National Guard troops, raise a family in the Sierras, and stay out of trouble. The Sheriff explained to them that this was their first, last, and only chance to get a clean start, and if they screwed up again, they’d be buried somewhere in the area in an unmarked grave. They didn’t have the resources to be feeding and housing prisoners.

The women were all “gussied up” and eager to meet their prospective husbands. The guys were a little gun-shy, but the women more than made up for them, and over the period of several days, most of the guys who wanted to get married and homestead found brides. Those that didn’t were offered barracks housing in the Armory. Between the stuff that they scavenged in Reno, and what the 40th brought with them from Sacramento, they were able to give each couple enough food, clothing and supplies to make it through the winter, and a supply of seeds for the spring. They’d share tools and equipment between neighbors, and cut/split wood as teams using the deuces and trailers to haul wood to the houses. Several of them

were experienced hunters, and shot enough deer so that everyone had enough venison to make it through the winter. The women were trained in the short time left by several women in town how to sew, cook, clean, can, and various other housekeeping duties. When it dawned on them how tough homesteading was, several wanted to go back to the honor camp until Larry said there was no going back. If they left, they would be exiled and left to fend for themselves in the dead zones. They'd heard about the "dead zones" to the west, and wanted nothing to do with them. Most single women in the dead zones were lucky if they died in the weeks after the attack, since the ones that were captured by the roving gangs were treated like slaves at best, and several were raped and tortured to death.

90 days after the Big Bang, Nick approached Gene. "I need to talk to you. I need your advice. Before all this, Darcy and I were talking, and she noticed I was friendly with the Jackie the Dispatcher. Darcy suggested that when we got divorced that I marry Jackie, since they got along and Jackie would be a good mother to Jill and Mike since she was the Earth Mother type. I'm done morning Darcy, and I'll miss her, but I need to move on. Also with all these single men around here, if I don't ask her, someone else will!"

"Nick, you're my best friend, but you're an adult. Do what you feel best." Gene thought for a second, and realized something, walked back to Nick, wrapped his arm around Nick's shoulder and said "Sorry Nick. You have my blessing too! Hope you're happy, and I'm sure that things will work out. Why not bring Jackie over tonight for dinner, just the 4 of us."

Nick thanked Gene, then called Jackie, and invited her for dinner at Gene and Lonnie's place. Gene and Lonnie went out of their way to make her feel welcome, and Lonnie realized that Jackie was like her mom in a lot of ways, then she was also more like her - she was into guns, hunting, and fishing too. She knew a lot about Herbal medicine, and was drooling over Nellie's library and her "apothecary" of herbal preparations. "Lonnie, I could do an awful lot with Nellie's library and her apothecary. If you're interested, I'd like to teach you about Herbal Medicine."

"Thanks Jackie, I'd appreciate that!"

Later that evening, Nick proposed to Jackie, who accepted in a heartbeat. They

were married in town the next day by the Justice of the Peace and settled into Nick's place. It took several days to move all of Jackie's stuff into Nick's house, but they made it fit. Over the next couple of weeks and months Mike and Jill got used to their new "mommy" and quickly warmed up to her. Jackie had a big advantage over Darcy, since she really loved kids and Mike and Jill felt it.

Chapter 17

Larry got a strange phone call that morning "Hello Furball, this is PsychoKitty. We need to meet face to face right now."

Larry jumped in his cruiser, and stayed on the cell phone. "Ok, I'm in my cruiser, where to?"

"Meet you in Loyalton. Keep your phone on."

The phone went dead, so Larry turned Northeast on 49 toward Loyalton. He left his lights and siren off, but as was his habit, he drove much faster than the posted speed limit. He knew these roads like the back of his hand, and his Bronco was customized to the point that it was barely recognizable as a Ford product. He drove at about 60 mph since he knew this wasn't an emergency. 20 minutes later, he was in Loyalton, and his phone rang. PsychoKitty told him to "Turn right on Smithneck Road on the west side of town and stop when you say Holy Sh#t!"

Larry turned right on Smithneck, and hadn't made it a mile when he yelled "Holy Sh#t!" and slammed on the brakes. He was facing the business end of a LAV-25 and the Bushmaster was pointing right at him. When the phone rang again, he picked it up and said "Nice directions."

"Get out of the car with your hands up, and walk toward the rear of the LAV and keep your hands in sight, I'll be out in a second."

Gene walked over to the rear hatch of the LAV-25 with his hands in the Surrender position, and waited. 30 seconds later, PsychoKitty opened the rear hatch, or at least Larry thought it was him. When he heard PsychoKitty's gravelly voice he knew it was him "What are you staring at Hairball?" Larry couldn't help himself. PsychoKitty looked like a normal Soldier, or at least as normal as someone with PsychoKitty's build could. Gone were the ear rings, tattoos, piercings, and the crazed look.

"It's me Sheriff. Come into my parlor, and I'll explain a few things to

you. I used to be a Seal Instructor, then I got into the DEA when that wasn't a big enough rush. I was deep undercover investigating the criminal biker gang's connections with methamphetamine production, distribution, sales and use. We also wanted to find out what the biker gangs were buying with all that money, and the disturbing answer was military equipment and full-auto weapons from corrupt Supply Sergeants. I got all that stuff I sold you and Larry from the same Supply Sergeant, then he introduced me to a Senior Supply Sergeant at the Barstow depot. They wanted my connections to the outlaw bikers to sell them weaponry and equipment, and sometimes front-line equipment. These guys had a huge racket going, but once DC got nuked, my supervisors died too, and I found myself out of a job. I considered going outlaw for real, but realized that was no life for my family, so instead I hatched a plan to buy some serious firepower with DEA money from these guys in my PsychoKitty persona, and move my family to your neck of the woods. I did some checking, and I really like Gene and Lonnie's setup. If they'll have us, I've got over a million dollars worth of Gold to invest and share to get us up to speed."

"What did you bring with you?"

"When GW nuked China, I saw the writing on the wall. I made contact with the Supply sergeant at Barstow and arranged to purchase a LAV-25 just like the one I sold you with a MK-19 in place of the Commander's MG with a full load-out including 30000 rounds of 25mm ammo, 4,000 rounds for the 7.62 coax, and 4000 rounds of linked HE and HEDP 40mm ammo. I also bought a Hummer with a Ma Deuce and 4800 rounds of linked combat load, and 2 deuce and a half's with trailers. One's a fuel trailer, and the other is carrying all the stuff I could buy while it was still available. We've been on the road ever since the Chinese nuked California and the East Coast. The best decision we made was to travel North up 395 after we sheltered in place for a week until the radiation died down. My team includes 4 retired Non-coms, including 2 SF Sergeants, myself and my best friend, who's a retired Recon Marine and their families. We've got all our personal weapons and gear, plus enough supplies to start farming as soon as we have a stable base of operations."

"Ok if I call Gene and ask his opinion?"

"Sure, just don't say where we are or anything."

"Gene, it's Larry. PsychoKitty's here, and he needs a place to stay. You're not going to believe this unless I show you, so meet me at the range."

Larry knew if they left now, they'd get to the range at the same time Gene would if they took his cruiser. The LAV couldn't keep up with his cruiser, so he asked PsychoKitty if he minded riding in Larry's cruiser. PK turned to the driver, whispered something to him, then they clambered out of the LAV and got into Larry's rig. As soon as the door closed, the LAV started its diesel and backed up then turned around and drove south down the road. They got into Larry's cruiser, and on the way to the range, Larry said "I can't keep calling you PsychoKitty, what's your real name?"

"Ok, you can call me Francis."

Larry remembered the scene from Bill Murray's movie "Stripes" and would have fallen over laughing if he weren't hanging on to the wheel. He leaned back and guffawed as loud as a mule. "Excuse me Francis, now I know why you chose PsychoKitty for your code name. So what did the outlaw bikers call you?"

Francis growled "None of your damn business!"

"Strange name for a biker!"

Larry's Bronco and Gene's Jeep practically collided at the range gate. They managed to arrive within seconds of each other. Gene kind of recognized Francis, and once he stood up, he was sure. "PsychoKitty, long time no see."

"Gene. You can call me Francis."

"Ok Francis. What's this all about."

"As you can see, Francis isn't who you thought he was. Suffice to say he

was working undercover, for whom you have no need to know. He managed to buy a nice LAV set up like your's, a Hummer, and enough stuff to set himself up. They need a place to settle down, and he knew this area was pretty secure."

"Sure, where you planning on putting them?"

"How about down the road from you guys in that big clearing that backs into the mountain."

"That would be perfect if they're considering an Earth Sheltered house."

Francis looked funny at Gene, so he explained. "We took Military Surplus Quonset huts, and used them as frames and forms for concrete-reinforced Earth Sheltered homes. They're huge, inexpensive and very strong. The 40th Mech should have brought some more Quonsets with them, how many do you need?"

"Probably 4 - I've got 4 families to house."

"How you set for food?"

"We've got enough to last the winter, but we've got over a Million in gold to buy stuff with."

"If you're planning on buying stuff, you better hurry up, supplies are running out and prices are going up."

With the preliminaries out of the way, Gene said he had to get back home, and Larry found temporary housing for Francis and his friends. It turned out that the 40th had several dozen spare 60x120 Quonset huts, even after they built houses for all the soldiers who wanted one. Eric was amazed that they'd want to bury 4 of them until Larry explained the theory behind Earth Sheltered housing. Suddenly it didn't seem like that bad of an idea. He passed Larry's information along to the soldiers who had already built houses, and they decided it was worth living in a "cave" to save them burning 10 cords of wood per winter versus 2 cords with the insulated Earth Sheltered design. They located a batch plant, and a bunch of reinforcing

wire, and started the process of reinforcing and burying their Quonset huts using the loaders and other heavy equipment. When they finished, Francis and his friends started building their houses about 5 miles from Gene's place.

Once everyone was finished building, Francis remembered something, and talked to Gene and Larry. What he told them got Larry talking with Eric and Neil. One of Francis' henchmen decided to tell one of the leaders of the gang that there was a lot of primo supplies and hardware to be had in Sierraville, and the gangs decided to pool their resources for this big attack in the Fall, then divvy up the spoils later. Francis found out about it by accident when he overheard his henchman talking about it at the local Biker bar. Francis took him out that evening, and by the next morning, knew everything he knew, which wasn't much, but enough to allow the National Guard troops to surround Auburn and destroy the outlaw gangs and their compatriots once and for all.

The 5 of them laid a map of the area on a large bench. Thanks to Francis's report, they knew about where the gangs would be congregating, and didn't have to shell the whole city. Bad news was they only had 1 battery of Artillery. They didn't want to waste their MRLS launcher on soft targets, so they checked the remaining Apaches, and they had full load-outs of the new APKWS missile which was a bridge between the old Zuni and the new Hellfire missile. He knew the APKWS would be devastating to anything less than an Abrams, and it was 3-5 times cheaper than a Hellfire. Eric, Neil, and Larry wanted to take all their firepower with them to take out Auburn, but Francis told them that they were keeping their LAV-25's and Hummers behind to defend Sierraville in case this was a diversion to get all their firepower out of Sierraville so they could come in there unopposed and take over. Eric shuddered, and agreed to park Francis and his team with the LAV-25 and the BMG-50 equipped Hummer on one hillside, and Gene, Nick, Hector, Luis and his neighbors with the LAV-25, LAV-AD and a Ma Deuce equipped Hummer on the opposite hillside so if anyone came up I-80 without broadcasting the ID code, they'd wipe them out. If they ran into a superior force, they could call Eric, and he'd send the choppers back to Sierraville as fast as possible.

Between them, they had 3 LAV-25's, two equipped with the Bushmaster 25mm

and a MK-19 grenade launcher, and the 3rd equipped as the LAV-AD with a 25mm GAU-12 and a 8-pack of Stinger missiles for air defense. The GAU-12 could also fire its gun forward and slightly down, and could shred any light armor in front of them. One of the Hummers was equipped with a TOW launcher that would be reserved for Abrams tanks if they had any, and was kept to the rear out of the line of fire unless needed. Eric showed them where the revetments were dug for the reception committee, and Francis thought they'd be perfect. Their LAV's would be hull down and hard to hit, and the turret would be able to traverse and engage targets all along I-80. The gunners on the MK-19's would be vulnerable, but their firepower was way out of proportion to their size, and a single HEDP round could take out a Bradley or other lightly armored vehicle if it hit the right spot. The MK-19 had the same range as the 25mm Bushmaster, and fired a large HEDP round that could penetrate up to 2 inches of armor so they were very valuable assets.

Before dawn the next morning, the remaining troops, tanks, Bradleys, LAV's, 4 Apaches, and the single remaining Kiowa Warrior headed west toward Auburn. The observer on the Kiowa kept glancing at the radiation meter in his lap, with orders to terminate the attack if the radiation levels were too high. The level never got much above background, so they kept searching. The Apaches and the Kiowa were loaded for multi-mission role, and the Apaches had 2 pods full of APKWS rockets instead of the Hydra pods, and 8 Hellfire missiles. The Kiowa was carrying 2 pods of APKWS rockets to give it the maximum number of kill stores. If they came across Main Battle Tanks, they were to let the Apaches engage them. The Apaches were followed by 6 Chinooks: 2 troop carriers and 4 carrying an 105mm M2A1 each plus a basic load of ammo for each gun. They'd already pre-spotted and registered their main artillery targets, and located a firebase at a nearby baseball diamond right about 5 miles outside town, well within range of their main targets. 2 Abrams and 2 Bradleys plus their attached infantry would defend the firebase against attack, and the remainder would act as a blocking force to engage any forces attempting to flee the artillery barrage.

While they were doing all that, PsychoKitty had a bad feeling in the pit of his stomach that this was a well-planned diversion ambush and asked two of

Hector's friends to act as an LP/OP about 5 miles west of their position to give them some warning of the approach of the enemy column. He told Gene his plan, and he agreed. Hopefully the dirtbags would roll fat dumb and happy right into their kill zone and get annihilated.

What was left of the 40th Mechanized Division drove down I-80 with the Kiowa warrior and the remaining Apaches acting as a scouting and advance Calvary force to engage any threats to the convoy. The helicopters were ordered to stay above Stinger range and to be careful, they didn't have any replacements. They arrived in Auburn later that afternoon, surprised when they didn't see any defensive preparations or OP/LP posts. Either these gangsters were dumber than dirt, or really smart. Eric had a bad feeling that Francis was right, and this was a diversion. He talked to the commanders of the 2nd and 3rd brigade, and realized that between the helicopters, artillery, and the remnants of the 1st brigade's Tanks, Bradley's, and Hummers (they took half of their available tanks, Bradleys and Hummer with them on their last attack, not knowing they were walking into a trap set by a superior force.) They should be able to defend the Artillery and still have credible blocking force to engage any survivors.

Eric asked for half their tanks, since they were road-bound targets until they got unloaded, so they left half their Abrams, but kept their LAVs and refueled them for the long drive back. Michael, the CO of the 3rd Brigade suggested that the LAV's and TOW armed Hummers charge up I-80, and the Bradleys and remaining Hummers escort the tanks, since there weren't many spots along I-80 to engage in tank battles due to the heavily wooded hills around it. Craig, the CO of the 3rd Brigade reluctantly agreed when he remembered what Eric had told him about how roughly Neil's transport troops had treated their first convoy. He wasn't too happy about losing the aerial support, and hoped whoever they were supposed to take out couldn't set up an ambush in less than an hour. With that settled, Eric sent the 2nd Brigade Hummers and LAV's charging back up I-80 on their own with no support, and sent the Abrams tanks he wouldn't need for the attack on Auburn back to Sierraville on their lowboys escorted by Bradleys and the Ma-Deuce equipped Hummers. Craig wished a couple of his Hummers were equipped with MK-19's but he had what he had, a conventional mix of TOW and Ma-Deuce equipped Hummers. He called Francis and gave him the ETA of the

2nd Brigade and the 3rd. Francis breathed a sigh of relief, knowing he'd only have to survive the next couple of hours, then the calvary would arrive.

15 minutes later, the OP gave him the news he dreaded, a huge armored convoy was coming up I-80 and they were loaded for bear. The only good news was they didn't have any Abrams tanks, and their heaviest tanks were older Desert Storm -era M60 Patton tanks. Francis had to smile at that, even off their lowboys, they'd make great targets for their TOW missiles. He wished they had some APKWS rockets, then realized they did have a bunch of LAWS rockets, and mentally checked the range, and remembered that it only had a range of 220 meters, and they were way over a quarter-mile away from the road, then realized the 25mm Bushmaster would punch right through the thin armor of the Patton even easier than it would wreck the Bradley. Once they came within visual range, his smile got even bigger, they had old cast-off equipment instead of front-line military gear, and he knew if they timed their ambush right, nothing would survive their initial volley. He checked, and his gunner already had M791 and M792 rounds already loaded and was waiting for the signal to fire.

Francis called Gene, and they talked briefly. Francis would start in the front of the convoy, and Gene's LAV would start in the rear, then any survivors would be engaged with the MK-19 to save 25mm rounds. Francis's gunner already had the front vehicle, an M113. in the convoy targeted, and when Francis said "Fire" both LAV's answered, firing their Bushmasters at low speed to conserve ammo. Francis' first round impacted low but by some miracle managed to knock a tread off. Swearing, Francis got off a second shot to finish the disabled tank, destroying the M113 and starting a fire. Gene was more fortunate, slamming his first shot home and blowing the M113 in the rear of the convoy halfway to the moon.

With their front and back of the convoy burning, the rest of the convoy was trapped like rats in a maze, with no way out, and the LAV's kept firing. Round after carefully aimed round sailed into the melee, with secondary explosions becoming the rule rather than the exception. People, yelling at each other to get clear, calling for help, or screaming in pain tried desperately to escape from the barrage by putting as much distance

between the road and themselves as they could. Few could make it out of the vehicles though, and those that did rarely survived the shrapnel that was sailing in every direction.

Gene got a phone call, it seemed the gangsters were even smarter than Francis gave them credit for, and took the long way around, and sent a large force on choppers and armed Jeeps up north and into Sierraville to take the town. Gene could put a stop to it, and as they were backing up to engage the new threat, he called Francis and told him what had happened.

"Don't worry kid, we'll clean up this mess, and we'll be right behind you."

Gene had the LAV-25, the LAV-AD, the Ma Deuce equipped Hummer, and he hoped it was enough firepower. It would take over an hour to get Francis' force out of their positions, over the bridge, and headed to Sierraville, and it would only take Gene's force 15 minutes. Lonnie called, and told him they were under attack at the Armory, and the only people available to defend the women and children sheltered there were her, Maria, Jackie, Larry's wife, and a couple of other women who had taken shelter there. They were using the MK-19 mounted on top of a Hummer that was in the shop for maintenance to keep the attackers at bay, but they were almost out of ammo.

Gene stayed on the phone with his wife, and when he realized which direction they were attacking from, he charged their position from the rear, heedless of his own safety, and once his forces were in position, engaged them with every gun he was able to bring to bear. His Mark 19 wrecked their remaining armed Jeeps with 1 shot, while his Bushmaster was chewing through and spitting out any remaining vehicles, and the 7.62 coax engaged any surviving gangsters. Gene was in no mood to take prisoners.

Eric was still shelling Auburn, but once when he heard about the attacks in Sierraville. He quickly ordered a cease fire and a rapid return to Sierraville. He took a big risk, and divided his forces to follow each of the roads that lead between Sierraville and Auburn in hopes of catching anyone fleeing the scene in a pincher maneuver and annihilating them. Eric wasn't in a mood to take prisoners either. The Abrams were ordered to stay off their lowboys, and to shoot anything that moved between Auburn and Sierraville. They weren't as fast on the roads, but

this was more than adequately compensated by their improved ability to maneuver and shoot. Each Abrams was accompanied by a Bradley and sometimes one but more commonly two armed Hummers for support.

Once they broke the back of the attack, Gene called Lonnie and told her they were driving up Battelle Street, so if they could avoid shooting their LAV-25 and Hummer he'd appreciate it. Lonnie told him several women were wounded by shrapnel, but they were already bandaged up and not in any real danger. When he heard that, Gene was wishing there were some more gangsters around to shoot! He drove up to the High School as quickly as he could, backed the LAV up to the door, and climbed out right into Lonnie's arms. She held her husband and cried. "Easy Lonnie, it's over now."

"You mean for now, but what about the next bunch of dirtbags?"

"How about if we send the 40th on a search and destroy mission, to take out anyone within a 100 mile radius of us. We're going to need the room to raise crops anyway, it's too cold up here to raise cattle or major crops like wheat, soybeans or corn."

"Why not ask them when they come back?"

"Works for me - I'm just so grateful you're OK."

"Me too Gene, feel like having another kid?"

"Are you sure, you just got Jake and Nellie weaned?"

"I wouldn't have asked if I weren't ready."

Gene hoped he could handle what Lonnie had in mind, he wasn't that young any more!

Chapter 18

The next morning, Gene prayed that Lonnie was pregnant, he couldn't take much more excitement. When everyone returned to Sierraville in a day or two, Gene called a meeting, and all the leaders met in Larry's office.

"Gentlemen, we got blind sided and almost lost the town yesterday. Gene, Francis and I have been talking, and we have a plan to hopefully prevent that from happening again. It involves some risk, but if it works, we'll gain a large pacified area, breathing room, and if we locate abandoned farms in the valley, room to plant crops and raise livestock. After the nukes hit, we have to assume that all State and Federal government agencies are flat on their backs. If there are any FEMA reps remaining and acting like they usually do - they're on their own and acting without legitimate authority. With the firepower of the 40th Mech, we can sweep the area from here to Sacramento clear of warlords, gangs and assorted scumbags, set the citizens of the various towns up as self-defense militias with the 40th acting as a reserve force and Calvary if they run into a superior force.

In order to defend the town and our homesteads, we need to take the risk of dividing our forces, and leave a self-defense force built around Gene and Francis's LAV's and Hummers where they can defend Sierra County from any further attack. Eric, Neil, and Leon, you need to come up with a plan to clean out our immediate Area of Operations, then fan out down the I-80 and State Route 49 corridors until you reach Sacramento."

Eric stood up and said "I've been thinking about this all the way home, and Larry's right. What I propose is we ask for volunteers from the 40th to form mechanized calvary teams using Bradleys and Hummers to sweep through the area, identify abandoned property, friendly and hostile forces, and eliminate the hostile forces."

"Eric, how are you going to prevent good people from shooting at you by mistake? The TV stations are still down, and I'm not sure if we can get our AM radio station working."

"We might be able to use our radio technicians to fix it, or we might be able to rig up a short-range transmitter broadcasting a taped message on several common AM

frequencies.”

“Good idea, you might want to locate a bunch of Gadsden flags, since they’d be easily recognized, and decidedly not a flag that anyone associated with the former government would fly.”

“OK, so when do you want to start these patrols?”

“Let’s give the troops a week or two to recuperate, check and service the equipment, then rearm and plan a route. I’d highly suggest a rotating schedule so no one is in the field for more than 30 days at time. It would keep your men fresh, and their wives happy.”

“Ok, eventually we’re going to have to establish temporary bases to stay overnight and refuel the vehicles instead of driving all the way back here. We’ve got several fuel tankers and trailers for that.”

“How about as you pacify nearby towns, you get permission to set up a bivouac and refueling point?”

“Great idea Gene.”

At this point Chris, the Aviation Brigade CO’s 2nd in command walked into the meeting and handed Leon a note. After he read it, he smiled and interrupted “Excuse me gentlemen, but I’ve been handed a note saying that the Aviation Brigade’s maintenance personnel have just finished a physical inventory of everything we brought, and located something that might help that I forgot about. We’ve got a half-dozen 3rd Generation semi-autonomous ROV’s in crates we’ve had in storage for years since we couldn’t use them in the crowded airspace near our base. Now that most of the planes aren’t flying anymore, it’s safe to deploy them, and each ROV can observe 20 square miles with enough target resolution to ID vehicles on roads. They can also zoom in and count the number of personnel in the back of a truck. 3 operators can keep several of them up at once, and keep a 10-mile area under continuous surveillance. With our limited threat axis, they could greatly expand that number by concentrating on road-bound attacks. Best of all, the daytime version is solar-powered and rocket launched, and can remain aloft until the batteries get low in the evening.”

Larry spoke up, “Gentlemen, this changes our strategy. With the ROV’s watching the base, all we need is enough firepower close at hand to repel an invasion. This should free up the majority of our Hummers and LAV’s to join the pacification teams. Gene, Francis, any problems acting as a self-defense force with your LAV’s and Hummers?”

“It would take us 20 minutes to drive them from our house to the High School. If the ROV’s could give us half an hour or 45 minutes warning, that should work.”

Larry looked to Leon, who was studying a map. “Gentlemen, at our maximum transmission range, we can set up an orbit 50 miles east and west of Sierraville over I-80, and 50 miles Northwest over State Route 49. That leaves the area between I-80 and State Route 49 unobserved, but it’s only secondary roads, and anyone attacking the area from more than 10 miles away would use 1 of those two roads to get close, then they might divert to secondary roads. Hopefully the ROV’s will be far enough out to spot them while they’re still on the main roads.”

Gene, Larry, Francis, Eric, and Neil all agreed it was a risk worth taking since it would take half of their available manpower to secure that area using LP/OP’s and patrols. Larry pointed out that they might need to revert to LP/OP and patrols in the winter, because he doubted the ROV’s could tolerate the high winds common in the area during the winter. They still thought it was worth it to get 6 months of coverage using only 3-4 people. With that decided, they modified their plans, and started organizing. During the next two weeks, Larry called and drove around the county, trying to locate someone in charge. The Mayor of Loyalton was in his house, and running things from there. Larry talked to him, and he agreed to help. They had a list of survivors, and by cross-referencing the survivors with the property tax rolls, they had a list of abandoned properties. Larry thought that was ingenious, and did the same in Sierraville. Once the census of survivors was complete, they checked on the properties that were abandoned. Several held dead bodies, and took several people with gas masks and strong stomachs weeks to clean out. All the houses were scavenged for usable supplies and equipment.

Several “abandoned” houses were occupied. Some by the original owners, and some by squatters. If the squatters had maintained the house, and planted a garden, they were allowed to stay. Several had trashed the houses, and there was evidence of looting including piles of expensive jewelry and TV’s in the bedroom.

The looters were shot, and the houses cleaned up as best as possible. Larry spoke to the original owners, and most just wanted to be left alone. Larry obliged them, and left.

2 months later, they had their immediate area surveyed and pacified, and they started working communities further west along SR-49. About 40 miles to their west, they ran into their first trouble in Downieville along SR-49. A bunch of small-time thugs had taken over the town, and until now had laid low and stayed off the radar. When the Calvary team showed up in 2 Hummers backed up by a Bradley, they new the jig was up, and went down fighting. Neil was grateful he had insisted the teams wear their LBV's and chicken plates, so instead of having 6 fatalities, he had 6 very angry soldiers with sore chests. As soon as the dirtbags opened fire, the Bradley gunner fired at the muzzle flashes with his 7.62 coax, decimating the attackers. The team leader regrouped his men, and once the firing stopped, they searched the building. One dirtbag had an AK on a bipod with a 70-round drum, and was decapitated by the return fire from the 7.62 coax. They looked, and couldn't find anything larger than bone fragments left from the guy's head. The gunner must have put the entire burst into the guy's head. In the next room, another dirtbag armed with an AR-15's chest was blown out by another burst from the 7.62 coax. The team leader was impressed, and thought that when they got back to base, he'd buy the gunner his own private stash of beer. They policed up the building, grabbed all the working weapons and ammo, and stored them in the back of the Hummer.

They located some thoroughly cowed and degraded survivors in Downieville, who recoiled at the thought of arming themselves even after the Team Leader explained that they were leaving and not coming back, and their nearest response was Sierraville, which could take half an hour to get there Code 3. The glazed look on their faces made the Team Leader quote a line from the movie Babe "Baaa Ram Ewe...Baa Ram Ewe...!" The glazed look on their faces didn't change, so the team left. They drove down the street, crossed SR-49 to Oxford Mill, which was a night and day difference from Downieville. 5 miles up the road, they had chained a dozen logs together into a very effective barricade, and Tom, the team leader, could see rifles poking out. He stopped the convoy, got on the PA and said "This is the California National Guard, 40th Mechanized. We're here on a peaceful mission, and have no intentions of harming you, confiscating your property, or otherwise doing anything illegal. If you're willing to talk, have a representative

step around the barrier. I'm stepping out of the lead Hummer with only my sidearm."

No sooner had Tom hung up the microphone, then he opened the door, leaving his M4 behind, he stood up with his hands in clear view. An older man walked around the edge of the barrier and yelled "Who are you, and what do you want?"

"Sir, My name is Tom. I'm the team leader of the 40th Mechanized California National Guard unit. We're surveying the cities and towns surrounding Sierraville, and offering our assistance."

"What do you have?"

"We'll discuss resupply after we make sure the area is secure. Are there any roving gangs of troublemakers around?"

"Just that bunch in Downieville."

"We took care of them."

"OK, those were the last bunch we've seen. We buried a bunch earlier that didn't take "get lost" for an answer."

"So Oxford Mill is secure?"

"As best as we can make it."

"Great, let me call that in, then we can discuss resupply."

Tom walked back to his Hummer, and while he was on the radio, he told his Gunner to remain alert - there was something about these people he didn't trust. Seconds later, the Gunner spotted movement in the trees - someone was trying to aim an RPG at them! His burst killed the gunner and detonated the round in the tube, blowing the gunner and his assistant into a red mist. Tom dove the rest of the way into the Hummer as bullets impacted the doorway, which was protecting his body. He grabbed the radio, and said "Check fire". The gunner heard his command without the radio, and released the trigger right before he shot the old

man. Tom was pissed, and was pretty sure the group was up to no good. He got on the PA and told the old man “It would NOT be a good idea to try and flank us again. Any further hostile move will result in the destruction of the entire town. We are who we say we are, and if you don’t stop trying to attack us, we will be forced to defend ourselves.”

2 minutes later, a shot rang out and the old man slumped to the ground. Tom yelled over the radio “Who fired?”

All his gunners checked in, and said they didn’t fire. Suddenly he looked up, and a middle-aged woman was standing over the cooling body of the older man with a pistol in her hand. She holstered the pistol, and raised her hands. “Don’t shoot. We took care of the dirtbags.”

Tom switched to the PA “We who?”

“These guys took over months ago, they belong to the same gang that invaded Downieville. They’re all dead now. We were just waiting for a chance to strike back, and your appearance made them all come to the barricade, and we saw our chance. My name’s Jeanette, and I would like to talk to you.”

Tom took a big risk getting out of the Hummer, but this time he kept his M4 slung over his shoulder.

“OK, I’m listening.”

“Thanks for showing up. Most of the menfolk are dead, and the women were held captive as slaves and such. Some of the younger prettier ones were used in horrible ways. Thank God I was too old and ugly for that.”

Tom thought Jeanette was pretty in her own way, but didn’t say anything. “Anyone need medical attention, food, or water?”

“Yes to all of the above, they starved and beat us regularly.”

“I’ll have the medic check everyone, and if we need to we can take anyone who needs more extensive care to Sierraville. I’ll have my men unload some cases of

MRE's and water, and we'll try and get your water system going again."

"All it needs is parts. The generator in town went out, and there was no power for the community well."

"Anyone try and dig their own wells?"

"Didn't have the equipment."

"We might have a well driller in Sierraville, and if the water table is shallow enough, we could rig up a pitcher pump or a windmill."

"Either one would be a Godsend."

Tom called on his radio, and offered Jeanette a ride back into town in the Hummer. They drove around the barricade, and over a dozen dirtbags were laying there with bullet holes in their heads. Tom didn't remember hearing any shots, and Jeanette explained that one of the ladies worked in Animal Control and owned a suppressed 10/22 with subsonic ammo. Once she shot the leader, the other lady took the rest of them out. They drove down the road to Jeanette's house, and saw several dozen women milling about. Some were in obvious need of medical attention, so as soon as the convoy stopped, the medics went to work. Several women were driven in a Hummer back to Sierraville for more extensive treatment. Two soldiers walked into Jeanette's dining room carrying boxes full of MRE's and bottled water. They were mobbed by the hungry women, and managed to set them on the table and quickly back up before all the women in the room grabbed an MRE and a couple of quarts of water, and sat down where they were to eat.

When they were done eating, Tom turned to Jeanette and said "there are several dozen single men in the 40th Mech living in Sierraville. If any of the women want husbands, they could come down here and get to know each other."

Jeanette's smile could have lit the room when she asked "How about you, are you single?"

"I had a wife and daughter until the bombs fell. They lived near Long Beach, and from what I heard, they were right at ground zero."

“I’m sorry Tom. If you need a friend, I’d like to see you.”

Tom was grateful that Jeanette wasn’t pushing things. She was one of the few women in the room that was his age, and he really didn’t want another family. Still he gave her a hug and a kiss on the cheek, and said “Thanks Jeanette, that means a lot to me. We’re going to be on the road for the next 90 days, but I’ll stop by when I can.” Jeanette gave Tom the Grand Tour. Her house was huge, and she said that if he needed to stay anywhere, she had 4 extra rooms, and they were all set up with a large garden and animals before the dirtbags showed up and took over. She started crying when she said her husband of 20 years and 18 year-old son were buried out back, they were killed in the fighting when the dirtbags came in and decided to take over. Tom held her, and said that they were going all over Sierra County to eradicate that kind of scum and free the people. They were also conducting a survey to locate abandoned property and equipment that might be essential to their survival as soon as they ran out of fuel.

“So what are you looking for?”

“Older farm equipment, horse-drawn and ox-drawn. Steam powered stuff, wind-driven. Basically anything that doesn’t require diesel or gasoline to run.”

“There’s a couple of older farms in the neighborhood, plus there’s that old mill in the creek just north of here the town’s named after. It’s not working right now, but it can be rehabilitated.”

“I forgot about water power. With as many rivers and creeks around here, that might be an idea!”

Tom’s report was read with interest by all the remaining bachelors in Sierraville. Eric gave them permission to convoy to Oxford Mill and meet the ladies. Most of the ladies were recent widows and were more than receptive to the idea of remarrying, especially to a soldier with their own personal tank! Over the next couple of weeks, Tom spent as much time at Jeanette’s place as he could, and the team wound up setting up in her front yard for a bivouac to explore further west on SR-49.

Chapter 19

Tom called Neil later that day, who said he was sending 2 additional teams to work further west on SR-49, since they found the dirtbags in Downieville, they decided to have Tom's team stay in Oxnard Mill, and check out the area between SR-49 and I-80. Tom gave Jeanette the news that his team would be there for the next couple of months, and Jeanette gave him a big hug and a kiss. Tom hoped the Chaplain was available, because if they kept this up, he'd be married sooner than he expected.

The next day a short convoy arrived in Oxnard Mill, and was directed to Jeanette's house. They spent the rest of the day setting up a long-term bivouac on Jeanette's property. One of the vehicles in the convoy was a huge M978 HEMTT fuel truck with 2500 gallons of fuel, and a tractor-trailer dropped off a 5K tank to refill the HEMTT from, giving them 7500 gallons of fuel for the military vehicles. Judging by the amount of supplies they were delivering, Tom knew he'd be there for at least 6 months, and asked Jeanette if it were OK with her. She kissed him again, and Tom took that for a Yes. The rest of the crew were pitching tents in Jeanette's yard, and erecting temporary buildings to house the vehicles and heavy equipment. Since they were 50 miles further west, and outside of radar and ROV coverage from Loyalton, they shipped an air-defense radar set, a LAV-AD for air defense, and 2 ROV's out of their spares kit. 1 ROV with an operator could provide raid warning for a 20 mile radius, to prevent Oxford Mills from getting surprised. During the evening, they'd have to rely on LP/OP setups on State Route 49 for early raid warning.

Once everyone was set up, they established a patrol routine and slowly cleared out and pacified the area between SR-49 and I-80. It was a maze of county roads, and sometimes they could take all day just checking out 5 homesteads.

Tom and his team were checking out a homestead near Miller Creek when his Hummer came under fire. Bullets were buzzing past, striking the body and windshield, and bouncing off in unpredictable directions. His gunner behind the 50 was swearing a blue streak since he was getting hit repeatedly by 5.56 bullets which stung like a bee sting instead of causing major damage thanks to his ballistic armor he wore. Finally he located the source of the fire and fired several bursts from his Ma Deuce, and the firing stopped. Seconds later the Bradley came

up behind him and they searched the tree line for anyone moving, wondering why they would shoot at them. They were flying the Gadsen flag, which was about as far from a PC One-world-government flag as they could get. “Ok, everyone, button up - someone out there doesn’t like us!” With the Bradley in support, his gunner dropped down through the turret and sealed up, swearing a blue streak. “Those @\$#@#ing 5.56 rounds really p@## me off! I’ll be sore for a week! I’m getting tired of sitting up there as a target for someone to shoot at - one day someone is going to get lucky Tom, and you’ll have to write that letter.”

“Look Bruce, no one lives forever. The 50 is one of the best defensive guns we have, and we’ve got tons of ammo for it - you know as well as I do how short of 25mm ammo for the bushmaster we are - Neil was right when he insisted that we only shoot the Bushmaster at armored targets. Besides, who would you ask me to put in the gunner’s seat if you vacated it?”

“Dang it, I didn’t say I wanted to quit, I’m just getting tired of being a target.”

“I’m just as much of a target as you are Bruce - if they shoot us with an RPG, I’m toast too - I’m depending on you to see stuff and kill it before it kills us. If you don’t want the job anymore, just let me know.”

“I guess my whine and complain break is over?”

“Yeah, back in the crow’s nest, and keep a sharp lookout - someone is shooting at us for some reason. Might be another gang hiding out here.”

“Dang, that’s the third one this week.”

As they rounded the corner, they were getting shot at again, this time Bruce fired a short burst at each set of muzzle flashes without being told to. Once they were sure the coast was clear, Bruce dropped down swearing again “This time I got it in the arm! This really hurts!”

Tom stopped the vehicle, and reached back to put a pressure dressing on the wound. Right when he got in the back seat, a huge blast rocked the Hummer, and he knew they’d been hit by a rocket. “Jim - it’s too hot here! We just got hit by an RPG in the engine. I think it came from that farmhouse on the right.”

“We’re on it.”

Seconds later, the Bradley opened fire and part of the building collapsed. As soon as the firing stopped, Tom opened the door of the Hummer, dragged Bruce out, and they took off running for safety. They were almost to the rear door when Tom saw a head pop up from the opposite side of the farmhouse, and fired a wild burst from his M4 just to keep his head down. Tom banged on the rear hatch with the butt of his rifle, and they dove in the door as soon as it opened. They got Bruce seated, and Jim yelled back “the Hummer’s toast, I’m amazed you made it out alive - let’s return to base, get Bruce fixed up, and come back for the Hummer tomorrow.”

Jim got his Bradley back to Oxford Mill, where the medics looked at Bruce’s wound, stitched it up, and told him it was just a flesh wound, but he would be off active duty for at least 2 weeks while it healed. When Eric heard about the attack, he was not a happy camper, and decided to send a stronger force. The next day an Abrams and several Bradleys showed up, and convoyed back to the scene of the fighting. With the Abrams in overwatch, the Bradleys unloaded their infantry, who checked out the area around the farmhouse, which was still smoldering from the fire they ignited by using the 25mm HE rounds. They found remains all over the place, and left them where they lay. They picked up any usable guns, ammo, and miscellaneous equipment, and stacked it in the center of the yard.

According to the census rolls, the Miller family was supposed to live here, and they had 2 teenage daughters. None of the bodies they found were female or teenage until they discovered signs of a mass grave out back. Tom knew the owners of the house were probably buried out back and the gang had taken over their house. He shook his head in weary frustration, thinking to himself “If only these damn Sheeple had armed themselves, they’d probably be alive now.” John, the infantry team leader, walked up to him, and told him the gang was armed with a bunch of SKS’s and other cheap rifles that were in such bad shape that they weren’t even worth salvaging.

“John, you keep collecting their rifles - a gun’s a gun if you don’t have one. Besides, we need to pick them up to keep them from falling into the hands of other gangs.”

John walked off muttering to himself, but he followed orders. 2 hours later, the area was policed up, and declared fit for habitation. Tonight when he got home, he'd call in his report and let them know the Miller place was available. It was a nice place with several deep wells and a large pasture to graze horses or cattle on, and a large well-tended garden. The garden was laying fallow and the pasture was overgrown since the gangs didn't care about farming, only robbing, pillaging and killing. When they finished, they hitched the Hummer to the back of a Bradley and hauled it back to Loyalton.

Over the next year, they finished pacifying the area around Oxford Mill, and Tom and Jeanette were married by the base chaplain. They took over Jeanette's master bedroom, and the rest of his team slept dormitory style in the remaining 4 bedrooms. They were grateful for the nice warm house, the hot meals, and the hot shower they got every day after they were through with work. In return, they chopped wood and tended the garden, and did other chores as needed around her house. Jeanette was terrified before they got married when she told Tom she had a hysterectomy years ago, but Tom just held her, and said that it was OK, he'd already raised his family. Now his job was to make things safe for the families that were raising the next generation.

Things slowly returned to a semblance of normalcy, except that both coasts had suffered extensive damage from the brief nuclear war, and there was precious little fuel available once their stock was depleted. That made the search for horses, draft animals, and cattle a priority. The further west they went, the more abandoned farms they found, but strangely the radiation levels were back down to background levels. Instead of moving the livestock, they moved families to the abandoned farms, set them up, and provided for their security. Each burg had at least a ballistically armored Hummer with a Ma Deuce plus all their small arms, and various light anti-tank rockets. They all set up civilian Militias for their own protection, and the remainder of the Military moved west to check on the rest of the area. They were pleasantly surprised by the lack of bandits and gangs, then they heard rumors that they were holed up in Sacramento when it got nuked, and ignored the warnings to seek shelter to loot instead. Most of them died from Radiation Sickness in the following weeks and months. They slowly expanded west into Sacramento, and avoided ground zero, which was still hot. Still, it gave them several thousand acres of arable land where they could grow rice and other crops for their use and to sell to others.

Over the next several years, the US slowly rebuilt. The East Coast and West Coast cities were abandoned, and the survivors moved to the countryside where they could raise food. Brigands and criminals still preyed on those who couldn't defend themselves, and were buried by those who could. All over the country, local militias took matters into their own hands, and slowly pacified the areas around themselves with help from the remains of the US Military. Thanks to the Chinese bombardment of the East Coast, the Federal Government never recovered, and the UN ceased to exist. The military retained control of the nuclear arsenal, and made it eminently clear to the rest of the world that we were more than ready to use the remains of our nuclear weapons on anyone who chose to attack us.

With the destruction of the US Government and economy, the rest of the world was hurting big time, and once the dust settled, the new rulers of the countries decided to wipe out all international debt and start over so countries that needed food could trade countries with excess food for stuff they wanted, and an international barter system evolved where someone would ship stuff to the US, and we'd ship excess food to them, usually in the same cargo ship. It took a long time to get started since almost everyone was subsistence farming. First thing we did was get our national oil platforms producing again, and using the remaining refinery capacity, started producing diesel fuel and heating oil, which were basically the same thing. Gasoline wasn't produced in enough quantity to support everyone who wanted to drive gasoline powered vehicles, so they stopped using them, and made enough avgas for the small number of commercial pilots who had gasoline powered planes. The US had an enormous stockpile of jet fuel, and they used it to keep military cargo planes flying were needed for essential flights. Businessmen paid a premium for available space on a plane, so no one flew for non-essential reasons.

Gene and Lonnie wound up having 4 kids, and their group slowly grew and prospered. Once they ran low on fuel, they saved what little they had for their defensive vehicles like the LAV's, Bradleys and tanks. They traded gold and silver, produce and rare supplies for horses, oxen, wagons, and horse-drawn farming implements. Their BMG-equipped Hummer and 600 rounds of ammo got them 6 draft horses and 1 year's worth of feed. Gene didn't want to part with it, but the threat to their community was virtually nil since the Sierra Militia had cleaned out all the brigands and gangs clear to Sacramento, and Reno had wiped out anyone on their side. Their two LAV's were more than adequate, and they

only had enough diesel to power the two of them. Maria and Hector had 4 kids as well, adding to the population explosion. Nick and Jackie had 2 kids which Mike and Jill thought of as their brother and sister, instead of step-brother since they were so young when Darcy died. Between the 4 couples, they had 18 kids, and they all pitched in to do the chores, which took all day using horse or oxen power instead of mechanical power. They were all grateful that they lived in very efficient houses when they had to cut those 2 cords of wood and split it by hand each year. As the settled areas expanded, and the children grew up, they moved into new areas that were suitable homesteads, built their houses, planted their gardens and raised their livestock. The US had for all intents and purposes stepped back 100 years in time.

The End